Writers In Progress

2000-2001

Writer's In Progress
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Robert was a student in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class during the spring of 2001. Along with writing, Rob also loves to be outdoors, exploring and sketching scenes from nature. The cover illustration for this year's Writer's In Progress *is an example of one of Rob's many nature drawings. This drawing is a scene from John Greenleaf Whittier's birthplace in Haverhill, MA. Rob felt this illustration was appropriate for Basic Writers because Whittier was a writer. He also felt the birds in the picture represented the "progression and motion" of the beginning writer's writing process.*

Special thanks to:
Basic Writing student contributors; Basic Writing faculty; Diane Gori, Writing Center Coordinator; Joanna Fortna, Basic Writing Curriculum Coordinator; David Kelly, Ed.D, Associate Dean, Division of Instructional Support; Patricia McDermott, Assistant Dean, Developmental Studies; the PACE and Voc-Ed programs.

Dedication

To all the students who think they can't,
and all the students who know they can.

Because of the large number of submissions we receive each year, we are faced with the difficult task of choosing which papers to publish. Space limitations prevent us from printing every paper we receive. We apologize because we believe that every writer who has had the courage and pride to offer his or her work for publication deserves recognition. This issue is dedicated to all of you.

We honor submissions from:

- Beatriz Abreu
- Carine Beya
- Michael E. Bunnell
- Juan R. Castanos
- Matt Cogswell
- Hamlet Collado
- Anny Cruz
- Emnilda De La Cruz
- Nick Dore
- Emily Durning
- Jodie Finno
- Charles Gioiosa
- Sue S. Gomez
- Juan C. Guzman
- Nada Hashem
- Chuck Hudson
- Tara-Joy Kennedy
- Larry Knowles
- Silkia Lopez
- Milagros Marte
- Helen Matvejeva
- Martha Medina
- Robert J. Mendoza
- Anita Mok
- Dalba E. Naveo
- Joel Noboa
- Johnny Ortiz
- Quiquez Pagan
- Heidis Parra
- Marie Rimpel
- Olubunmi Sonuga
- Anne Stepanian
- Derek Sullivan
- Ysabel Tejada
- L. Evelyn Torres

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Introduction

Writing, being a highly difficult craft, is nothing like magic. A good piece of writing is not produced by the flick of a finger or the wave of a wand, as most of us wish. Time, effort, and patience are only some of the elements of the writing process, which are infrequently spoken about to other students and writers. We tend to only admire the finished product and not the different attempts, versions, and occasional disasters of the evolving text as it unfolds into a finished product. This is the challenge of writing courses as they struggle to mold writers out of students. The Basic Writing course, where this year's *Writers in Progress* texts were created, opens the students' and professors' eyes to the arduous process of writing, allowing them to better appreciate the process with each new writing project.

The contributors of this year's *Writers in Progress* were all Basic Writing students at Northern Essex Community College during the 2000-2001 academic year. Students from 29 sections submitted their best essays for consideration, and, out of the nearly 80 submissions, 22 were chosen to represent the works created in Basic Writing. However, even if not published in this student written publication, being asked to submit an essay for consideration by a tutor or a professor is a remarkable honor.

Dedicating time, effort, and patience, the writers in this edition of *Writers in Progress* saw their ideas metamorphose into products that they as well as their fellow writers and professors could admire. These works are expressions of the writers, and now they are impressive examples for others. I hope we can all appreciate this year's essays, not just as models for writing or as noteworthy discussion pieces, but as examples of the great quality and diversity of student voices and experiences. This collection of essays is evidence of the true intricate, addictive and passionate nature of the writing process.

Jacqueline Pena
May 2001

Bath Time
by Amber O'Connor

My bathroom is a very boring room. It seems more like a storage room for my bathroom stuff than a bathroom because I never do anything in there except to clean it, take a shower, and to give my daughter a bath. But when I give her a bath, it becomes a wet, scented, playful bathroom.

As the water runs into the off white bathtub, I can see the bubbles forming at the top of the water. It smells like bubble gum. I sit here on top of the sink, which is a smooth, marbled, off-white and tan color, and is very cold on my bottom. Underneath the sink, there is a cupboard where I put all my personal items, like the extra soap and the extra shampoo for my daughter and I. The cupboard is painted green. The previous tenants painted it. There is a gold-framed mirror just above the sink. To my left is the tub and to my right is the toilet; it is covered with a green slipover with a green rug around it. To the right of the toilet is the window that has an off-white blind on it.

Directly in front of me is the door to get in and out, but a little to the left is the closet, where I keep the towels, the wastebasket (for all the dirty laundry), more personal items, and cleaning stuff. On the first shelf is where the towels go; on the second shelf is where I put all the baby's and my Tylenol and other medications, face creams, my boyfriend's (Isabel's father) hair clippers, and all the cleaning stuff.

As the steamy mist fills the room, it brings out the smell of the Dove body soap. As Isabel gets into the bathtub, the bubbles cling to her little goose-bump filled body. She is two years old. Isabel enjoys playing a game that involves a lot of splashing. She tries to pop every bubble that she sets her eyes on, but before doing all that, she screams, "1, 2, 3, Go!" While she's dong all of this, beautiful laughter comes from that gorgeous face, with those big, blue eyes full of life, with her wet hair dripping around her ears and shoulders.

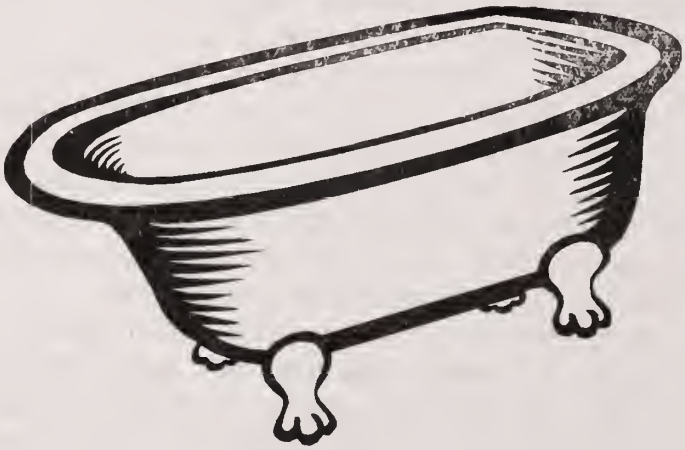
There are about a dozen different toys floating on top of the water around her. She can never decide which ones to play with. There's a bunch of Sesame Street rubber blocks, blue, green, yellow, red and purple, all different colors. There is a light yellow, blue, and pink, infant key chain toy, and some other toys floating around in there too.

By now the water is getting kind of cold. I have to add more hot water. Now I have to wash her hair. The room is beginning to smell like baby shampoo. The bubbles are almost gone. I can see the green mat at the bottom of the bathtub. It matches the green and white marbled shower curtain.

The baby's toes and fingers are all wrinkly and soft looking. That's a sign it's time to get out. I wrap her in a big soft green towel. When she gets out, she drips all over the green throw rug in front of the bathtub. The linoleum tiles look very cold on her little wrinkled feet. I throw a big, green, fluffy, warm, comfy looking towel around her little wet body. She looks so warm and relaxed.

She runs out of the bathroom leaving little puddles of water behind every step she takes. I'm left in there to clean up the wet linoleum floor. That is what happens in my little bathroom world when I give Isabel a bath.

Now that bath time is over, the bathroom becomes the storage room again. It seems very hollow or empty. It is pretty lonely without my little bundle of life in it.



Amber O'Connor is a 17-year-old mother and student. She is a nursing major and is aiming for a career in nursing. She took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course in the fall 2000 semester. Her hobbies and interests include fishing, swimming, playing, and teaching her daughter new and fun things.

Two and a Half Minutes
by Herb Martin Jr.

As I pulled off the busy street and up to the dim lit entrance, every thing was very quiet. The only movement was a squirrel shooting for the nearest tree. After I stopped, it seemed like it took forever until the car wash attendant came out, but it took only a few seconds. The attendant was tall; he wore a tee shirt and jeans with work boots. From the flow of movements that he showed, I could tell that he has thought out every action to maximize his performance of getting the customers through as fast as he could.

When the attendant started to direct me in, it was like driving into a large mouth. Deep down in my mind, I was still nervous, hoping that the car wash would not break anything on my car. As he directed me even deeper into this mouth, I heard a high pitch squealing noise. The attendant told me that it is the inside of my tire rubbing the metal rail and not to worry. Soon after, the attendant pushed many different buttons on a black and gray box that hangs on the wall. The buttons are in perfect rows and columns. Each button has its own purpose from the words that are printed on it just above each button. There was a slight jolt from behind. It felt just like someone hit the back of my car with his car.

Still moving slowly further into the car wash, just before my car gets to two large metal arches, white foam soap showers the car. As the soap moves up the window, it reminds me of when I was a child pulling a white bed sheet over my head. This is where I get nervous because I don't know what is going to happen next. The further I move, the darker it gets.

As I enter the first set of cloths, it seems like these long blue things come to life. They start moving almost like they are dancing for me. When I look at the hood of the car, these now alive dancers move out of the way for me. With gentle touching, it feels like they are rocking the car to get me to dance also.

The musty smell of the car wash mixed with the faint aroma of cherries from the wax, fills the car like the smell of freshly sprayed perfume, long after the window is rolled up.

After a few seconds, the dancing stops, and it gets light again. When I look out the window, it looks like two tornadoes heading right for me. Just barely missing slamming into the front of the car, they brush the side of the car. It felt like I just barely excepted tragedy, but still there are two more smaller spinning brushes that are going to slam into my car. The sounds of these brushes as they touch the car are little drummers pounding their drums gently as I pass through them.

I know I only have a short way left, but it seems like they want to keep me blind because it sprays again out of a couple more arches. This time the spray is in a back and forth motion, just like the way tree limbs sway back and forth in a gentle breeze.

When I looked in the rear view mirror, it looked like it was waving goodbye. Then a loud thunder began as if I was driving through a severe thunderstorm or a large waterfall. Then I felt the car start to shake and vibrate as I got closer to these large things. They are so powerful; it feels like they are going to rip the vehicle apart. As I pass through the windshield wiper, arms flutter up and down like they are going to be torn from the car. This is where I want to drive out so nothing happens to the car I value so much, but I know if I do that there is more of a chance of something breaking.

I start out the last set of blowers. These are not as bad as the previous ones, not quite as powerful passing through. It looks like a large plastic thing sweeping over the car; as this moves over the windshield, I notice I'm at the end of the journey.

This is when I feel excited, relieved, happy knowing that I'm OK and the car is fine, yet I still feel sad even after all this. It was the quietest two and a half minutes I have experienced.

Herb Martin Jr. is the manager of a car wash and a computer programming major at NECC. He took Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing course in the summer 2000 semester when he was 25 years old. At first, Herb did not like writing, but by the time the semester came to an end, he felt that writing was less stressful for him.

Chipmunk Cove
by Herbert A. Pearson III

In Barrington, NH, there sits Chipmunk Cove, my Grandfather's camp, which is really a small cabin just big enough for two families. Since I was a baby, about five months old, my parents would take me up there every summer. I was about two years old when my new baby sister joined us. It was the most wonderful place in the world.

To get there you would have to drive down this long and winding road. This road was a very desolate road with rows of pine trees on both sides, and not another road or house for miles. As you continued along, the road would dip and rise. About the only enjoyment my sister and I got on this boring road was this one spot where you would go up this small hill, and then it would dip sharply. If my dad went fast enough over this hill our stomachs would jump. My sister and I would beg my dad to speed up every time we got close by yelling, "Faster! Faster!" He would speed over the hill, our stomachs would jump, and we would all laugh.

Once you finally get to the entrance of the camp, a small narrow dirt road extending through a row of pine trees, you just knew it was a matter of moments before you would reach the place you have been longing for. You would still need to drive a little ways in, past a few other cabins, till you could park your car at the top of a hill. Looking down the hill, your wait would be over for sitting at the bottom was the small brown shingled 4-room cabin, quietly waiting to come alive.

As you started down the hill, the smell of pine would fill your lungs and the clean crisp air would make you feel like running, which we sometimes did, down the hill, taking us a full minute to reach the bottom, watching out for trees as we went with the wind rushing across our faces as bits of sunlight peeked from behind the treetops above. We ran up and across the porch, right into the cabin. On other occasions, we would sit on our behinds and slide down slippery pine needles, which covered the ground from the trees giving shade to the area.

When you get a moment to look around, you would see that this is a nice secluded spot. There is a man-made lake, which was always dark green in color because of being made from a quarry. If you sit close enough in front of the cabin so that if you stood on the porch you could throw a rock into it, something I did often to the protest of my mother. A little bench only big enough for about five people to be on it, waited to the left for kids to play on its hard sandy surface. Trees surround the lake with only three or four cabins across from us poking through looking like small dollhouses. The lake extended around the cabin until it made a small cove in the back ten steps away. The songs of frogs would fill your ears as you stood there taking everything in. The lake also extends to the left and behind the hill hidden by large pine trees. It was a great place to swim and fish, something my dad and I did a lot when I was old enough.

The cabin was also a fantastic place at night. The damp, musty smell of the cabin would fill the air as we entered our bedroom to try and go to sleep and the smell of the fresh firewood burning in the fireplace my dad and grandfather built. The music of the frogs would sing us to sleep in the cove, one or two frogs gulping high, another gulping low. Each frog in the cove would do this fast and slow all night long. It felt like the safest place in the world.

When I turned twelve my childhood summer dreams turned into a nightmare. My grandfather sold Chipmunk Cove. Everything that meant something to me was now gone: my hill, my cabin and my frogs. All that was left at that moment was anger and sorrow, but I grew up and Chipmunk Cove will live in my memories and will always be the safest and most peaceful place on Earth.

Herbert A. Pearson III lives in Salisbury, MA. At 32, Herbert is majoring in human services, and he is aiming for a career as a Salvation Army officer. He took Margaret's Basic Writing course in the fall 2000 semester, and during his free time, he enjoys music and art.

Guardian Angel
by Edwardina Lima

The world we live in is not always kind. We have to learn how to deal with the ups and downs that life throws at us. Instead of dodging these problems, we need to learn to deal with them. As the saying goes: "Life is not always a bed of roses." We all need someone to help us and guide us through. My mother is my guardian angel. She has always been there for me, teaching me from a young age what good and bad meant, how I should treat others, and how I should expect to be treated.

Let me tell you a little bit about this woman of many faces. My mother loves to cook and bake. Every time she cooks and bakes she never measures her ingredients. It's always a pinch of this or a dash of that. One of my favorite dishes that my mother makes is roast pork with potatoes. No matter what she cooks or bakes, it's always fantastic. You're probably thinking I'm bias, but to me she is the greatest cook in the world.

She always wears her favorite faded blue housecoat when she stays home. The slender curves of her fingers are dressed up with gold rings, which complement her six bracelets on one hand. But when she goes out for an occasion, she is dressed to the max. Everything matches from her dress and shoes to her purse; and yes, let's not forget her ensemble of jewelry. Her hair is short and always looks like she just came from a hairdresser. I remember when we were younger she didn't have this luxury. We always came first in my mother's eyes.

My mother didn't have many advantages in her life. She was raised in one of the small Azorean Islands called Faial. My mother lived on a farm where she would milk the cows, and feed the chickens and pigs. Maria, my mother, was the youngest of three and the only girl. She would always be reminded by her parents not to get attached to the animals because one of them could be lunch tomorrow. She was not able to attend school because she had to do chores, which included working on the farm from dawn to dusk. She would pick the vegetables that were bursting out of the brown rich soil beneath her feet, one by one, and also pick the blushing tomatoes that were dangling from the end of the vines.

I admire my mother because she has always struggled throughout her life and has never complained to us about how tough it was when she was young. To her, it was part of life and she did whatever it took to survive. Maria, my mother, taught herself how to read and write in her own native language. She also got married at the age of fifteen and never had a childhood. She would tell me, "It was tough, but you did what you had to do; it was part of life." At a young age, my mother always dreamed about America, the land of plenty.

In the 1960's, we came to America from Azores to have a better life. My father got a job at The ShoeBox Company and my cousin was his boss. It worked great for my father, especially because of the language barrier. My mother wasn't so lucky. She went

father, especially because of the language barrier. My mother wasn't so lucky. She went to work at a sweatshop called Greco Brothers, which was located in downtown Lawrence. At that time, the population in Lawrence was mostly Italian and no one spoke Portuguese, only Italian. Now that I think back, it must have been very difficult for my parents to adjust, especially for my mother.

She always made our clothes when we were young. Coats, hats or dresses, she made them all. She would make her own pattern with paper bags that came from the grocery store. I remember her measuring my waist and cutting the pattern out of the brown paper bag. When it was payday for my mother, she always bought us a large box of delicious and mouth watering chocolate cherries from down town. She was always thinking of us no matter where she was. She would always say, "This is your reward for doing your chores."

I look at this small five foot framed person with white silky, aging skin and coffee brown hair and wonder how she frightened me when I was younger. I remember my mother was stern with me. There were times when she spoke with this firm look on her face and her small hands wrapped around her waist as she stood at attention. Her blue eyes stared at me, telling me what she expected. She would say, "Make sure all your homework is done and don't forget to do your chores." I am sure she didn't mean to put fear in me, but if she told me to jump, I would say, "How high Mom?" I'm not saying she was a mean mother. She just kept me in line.

I have three sisters and one brother. When bad weather is predicted, you can be assured my mother will call each of us. It's really funny because even though we are all grown up with children of our own she still calls us to make sure we are safe. My mother always says, "Make sure the kids come home and tell them not to make any stops to their friend's house." With a stern, but gentle voice she says, "They shouldn't be on the road in this kind of weather." After speaking with my mother, I would call my sister, Jean, and before I could even say something, she would know it was me. Jean would say, "Yup, Gestapo Mom called," and we would both laugh. She always gave the same speech to all of us.

My mother is very headstrong. If she wants to do something, she will go to any lengths. For example, when I was having my third child, Heather, my mother wanted to see her. I can't recall why she couldn't get a ride, but for some reason, there was no one around to give her a ride. She actually walked three miles from her house to the hospital. I couldn't believe it when she told me she walked. I said, "Mom, that's dangerous; you shouldn't walk that far by yourself." The last mile of her walk is through a very isolated area that is congested with trees. She replied, "I'm not going to miss seeing my grandchild." You would think this was her first grandchild, but it was her seventh.

When we gather for holidays or birthdays, my mother would reminisce about the old days. With her soft sweet voice, she would tell our children stories about how we were when we were young. If you could hear my mother's stories, you would think we were all saints. You can always see the twinkle in her eyes and her facial expressions of joy and happiness when she goes on with her stories.

One Sunday morning, I went to visit my mother and I greeted her with a kiss. As I sat down next to her on the fluffy blue couch, she reached over and gave me a huge bear hug. I could feel her soft silky hands touching the back of my neck and caressing me. She pressed her warm silky lips against my cold cheeks, and I could smell the sweet aroma of

her perfume. It's a smell that is indescribable. Every time I smell this aroma it's like she is always with me no matter where I am.

As you can see my mother is a loving and caring person and always thinks of others before she thinks of herself. She always seems to make time for me no matter what my needs are. She is always there. She has guided me through life and always embraces it with full strength. She has encouraged me to do whatever I believed in. She has always helped me overcome any barriers that I have encountered. When there are times that I am down, she is always there to say a kind word and help me feel good about myself. That is why she is my guardian angel. I hope everyone has a person like this in his or her life.

Before taking a Basic Writing class, Edwardina Lima (Dina) said, "I couldn't write at all, and felt very uncomfortable." But, after taking Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing course in the spring of 2001, Dina said she "could express herself...and communicate better." Dina is a Business Major here at NECC. She likes to cook and spend time with her family. Dina has been married for 24 years and has three children, ages 17,18, and 21.

Nana Molis
by Elaine Lovejoy

From the front entrance of the nursing home, I can see several of the elderly patients. They are in wheelchairs, sitting almost in a circle around the blue-green colored nurse's station like a colorful display of pastel fleece and flowery print fabrics. They remind me of a litter of kittens waiting patiently for their mother's attention. A few of them are talking to themselves, if anyone at all.

Nana Molis, my grandmother, is seated at the center of the group. From here, I imagine she gets a very clear view of the many activities and tasks performed by the aides that work at the home. Nana has always been a people watcher. When she was a few years younger, twice a week, she would take the downtown bus from the corner of D and Baxter streets in South Boston where she lived to find a suitable park bench with a great view of the hustle and bustle of the city. Sometimes she would stay for hours. When I visited Nana I'd hear stories in great detail about the various styles of clothing that the ladies wore, or how much the hairstyles have changed over the years.

Upon seeing me, Nana's eyes open wide and I can see that they still have a sparkle to them. Her hair, completely white and kept short, frizzes out around her head resembling a soft halo. She smiles a great big toothless smile and says in her thick Lithuanian accent, "Hello Doll! Let's go to my house." I greet her with a hug and a kiss and slowly wheel her back to her "house" room one fifteen. Nana's bed is near the window and the drapes are kept open for her to be able to view the garden outside. Overgrown pink azalea and rhododendron bushes are very close to the window. Dozens of small birds, mostly swallows and sparrows, are flying about the bushes and it is quite a sight. Nana says that they do that all day long and sometimes they fight too. She tells me, "They're fresh, like the chickens on the farm in the old country." I remember that story well.

As a child growing up on a farm in Vilnius, Lithuania, Nana had many chores. Her main responsibility was to feed the chickens. One particular day when she entered the wired coop and began tossing small handfuls of corn on the ground a few of the larger hens became over excited and started fluttering about, pecking at my grandmother's hands and feet. It turned out to be a good experience for Nana because after that day she no longer had to feed the chickens. Instead, she had to accompany her father as he went to collect the honey from one of the beehives, a task that she truly enjoyed.

Life on the farm was not easy for my grandmother during World War I. Food became scarce and when the Polish soldiers came into their small village, Nana and her sisters quickly gathered the cows and sheep and stayed hidden with them in the forest until the soldiers had left. I also remember a story about how on one Easter Sunday the family meal consisted of three eggs and one small loaf of bread. Nana, her three sisters, her four brothers, and both parents shared this meal. I remember Nana had cried telling this story and that I cried along with her.

When Nana was eighteen, she married a handsome young man from her village. Papa Molis had black hair and piercing blue eyes. He was the complete opposite of Nana, for she had hazel blue eyes and blonde hair. Not too long after they were married, they migrated to America on a sailing ship called The George Washington. The voyage lasted for two months, which were very grueling for Nana because she was both pregnant and

seasick. They settled on a small farm in Norwell, Massachusetts, and raised Helen, my mother, there. The chimney was old in the farmhouse and the house had caught on fire, completely destroying it. My grandparents moved into a three family home on Baxter Street in South Boston, where they stayed for over fifty years.

I have wonderful memories of my summer vacations spent at Nana's house. She would take me to the Franklin Park Zoo, Revere Beach and Castle Island. We would walk for hours on the beach, and when the sun began to lower we would dig for clams. Nana said that if the clam squirted water in my face it was good luck. Nana told me it was also good luck when a seagull "dumped" on my head, which made us both laugh all the way home.

Nana loves to play games. We often played hide-and-seek, tag or Mousey-Mousey, a tickle game that she invented. Mousey would search for his beloved cheese and always find it in my armpit, driving me into hysterics. Other times on the walk home from Taylor's Market we would play Treasures. For this game we needed to walk down both Silver and Gold Streets. On Silver Street, Nana would wait until I wasn't looking and take nickels and dimes from one dress pocket and toss them onto the sidewalk. She would sing out, "Look! Treasures!" and I would scurry about picking up my silver coins and placing them into my pockets. On Gold Street there would be lots of shiny pennies. On the way home if I complained about how heavy my load was to carry, Nana would just laugh and say, "Well, you are a millionaire now." Nana would always try to make every experience a humorous one.

I wait patiently as the nurse attendant changes the sheets on Nana's bed. I recall many years back when I was a teenager watching Nana as she changed the soiled sheets from Papa's bed when he was very ill from liver disease. Papa would be embarrassed and apologize for the hard work and kissing his forehead, Nana would say, "No, Doll, nothing to be ashamed of." After Papa died, Nana stayed home for many months. But eventually, she began taking her afternoon trips to downtown Boston again.

Another aide will join the attendant in a few minutes and together they will lift Nana from her chair and lie her on her freshly made bed. They will then remove the clothes she's worn today and replace them with a soft blue flannel nightgown. Nana will smile and say to them, "Thank you" and "God bless you." Though she has suffered many hardships during her lifetime, she is still a kind and loving person.

My ninety-three year-old grandmother is an inspiration to me. She still tries to deal with every situation in a positive way. I believe that's why I see the water glass as half full. My grandmother has shown me how to laugh at unimportant things and how to be forever playful. Some of these traits have trickled down the family tree to my two daughters and I think Nana has been an inspiration to them as well.

Nana is snuggly tucked under the blankets now and I kiss her goodnight. "I love you," I tell her.

She says, "I love you too, a million times." I can hear her soft laughter as I leave the room.

Elaine Lovejoy, of Salem, MA, is currently a Business major here at NECC and is considering changing her major. Before taking Brian Kuhl's Basic Writing course in the spring of 2001, Elaine said, "I had very little confidence in myself as a writer. I feel very enthusiastic now!" Elaine, a mother of two daughters, likes to read, write and hike.

My Sister, Amy
by Gina Michaud

As Amy and I were sitting at the table, she was reading her nursing book, and I was taking a short intermission. I noticed she was wearing dark blue, boot-cut jeans that made her look tall and slim and a white tee shirt with a red zip-up sweater. Amy has brown short hair with blonde highlights throughout. It's layered, which makes her hair look fuller and softer. It is evident that she spends more time in the bathroom to make herself look striking. She has big brown chocolate eyes that are enhanced by her perfectly shaped eyebrows. She has a small long shaped nose with a small mouth. Her complexion is pale, which makes it obvious that she has minimal time to spend outside.

Amy is attending school at Umass, Lowell. She is in her last year of the nursing program. She has worked hard these last five years to achieve her goals. Amy has always been a good student. Her name was always on the Dean's List. I know she will be a great nurse when she finishes school. The other day she was telling me, "I have twelve weeks left. I can't wait to be done."

When she is not busy with school, one of Amy's hobbies is baking. She is always looking in magazines to see if she can find different recipes. The other day she found a recipe for blondie brownies. As I was sitting in the living room watching her gather all her ingredients, she had such a serious look on her face, but every now and then she would crack a smile. Amy was ready to bake. Most of the time her boyfriend ends up being the guinea pig. Her famous words are, "Hun, you have to try these brownies. They are so good."

As Jimmy takes a bite, I watch him chew it slowly. He responds with, "Honey, they are so good. You are such a great baker." I always make fun of her because she bakes so much. Her nickname is Betty Crocker; I named her that because she is always baking in her spare time.

Her most significant characteristics are that she is very polite and understanding. She is there for her friends, her boyfriend, and even her co-workers at the drop of a dime. This one time we were sitting in the living room and she blurted out, "Let's go to Foxwoods." I had the next day off and so did her boyfriend and his friend Chris. We woke up early the next morning, got showered and dressed and headed out the door. We had to go Dunkin' Donuts. She had to get coffee to "wake her up." After that, we went towards the highway to go to Foxwoods. After being on the road for two hours, we finally got there.

Amy was so happy and excited. She was like a little kid going to Chuck E. Cheeses for the first time. The guys went one way and we went another. We had the best time laughing, spending money and even losing money. But that didn't matter. We were having fun anyway. She was being funny and commenting on the old people there. She said, "I feel like I'm at a senior citizen's convention. We are surrounded by old people with walkers." We laughed so much that tears were streaming down our faces. We met up with Jim and Chris for lunch. We headed for the food line and she noticed a little old lady lying on the ground. Her first instinct was to help her. She squatted down next to the little old lady and asked her questions: "Are you all right? I'm a nurse. Let me help you." Then, she yelled out, "Call an ambulance!" Luckily, Chris was a doctor so he made sure the old lady was okay. But the fact that Amy was there trying to help made me feel proud to be her sister.

I don't have to worry. I know she is going to be a great nurse someday. She is very good to her patients at work. When I went to visit her in the Intensive Care Unit, I heard her behind the curtain talking with one of her patients and being so kind and trying to make the patient feel as comfortable as possible. She told the patient, "I'm going to put cream on your back and turn you on your side for a while so your bottom won't be sore." The patient had suffered a heart attack and had to stay in bed, so she went in and made sure he was turned every two hours. That same patient moved up to my floor when he got stable. He asked me if I had a sister who worked down stairs because we look a lot alike. I told him I did and he commented that "she is a very nice girl and has a great personality."

I know for a fact that she is well liked by her co-workers. One day, I was on the elevator with a lady who used to work with Amy on a different floor. She asked me, "How is Amy? We all miss her on the floor." She commented, "She was such a good worker and cared very much for her patients and even made the patients' families feel comfortable." Hearing all these great comments about Amy makes me proud to be her sister. I know she will have a great future in nursing.

Amy has a positive effect on me. She is very ambitious towards her goals. I sometimes wish I could be like her. She is always telling me, "Go back to school. Get your nursing degree. If you put your mind, time and effort into it, you can do it." Eight years later, I finally took her words of advice. "You have nothing to lose. All you can do is try," she tells me. So now I'm back in school trying to do the best I can.

I am a different person because she has always been there to help and support me. When I was trying to lose weight, I used her as my inspiration. She had lost 90 pounds and I knew that if she could do it, I could also do it. I watched her change her eating habits and add exercise to her daily routine. The weight just started melting away. It was hard for her, but she is happy with the way she looks. Amy was a great inspiration for me

to also change my ways. She was always there to help me eat right, or we would go to the gym together and workout. She also helped me get a new job, and it helped me decide that I also wanted to become a nurse. Amy has given me a positive outlook on school when for me it was always negative.

She has also taught me that if one relationship has gone bad not to give up hope. Another man will come along when you least expect it. She said, "One day you will be at Market Basket and you will meet the man of your dreams in the fruit aisle." We laughed, but I think if my sister wasn't around, my life wouldn't be the same. We grew up and have become very good friends and I wouldn't change a thing.

Her boyfriend Jim loves and adores her. He sends her cards and flowers to tell her that he loves her. They had gone away for two days to the Cape and the next day he put a card on her bed. It read: "Hey Hun, thanks for being such a wonderful girlfriend and for always being there for me. I love you with all my heart. You are truly the best thing that has happened in my life. I love you and I'm so very proud of you. Love you, Jim." My parents are also very proud of my sister's accomplishments. They love her very much. They know she will succeed in life.

In about ten years, Amy will be 31 years old. She has always been very mature for her age, so her maturity level will be the same. I'll have to say that she will change dramatically and inevitably. She will have experienced being a nurse for ten years. I know that she wants kids and a beautiful house. I know that she will continue being a very positive person who will always push me to go further in life and to never give up on my hopes and dreams. I know that she will have a very good life for herself and her family. Amy has always been a very happy and content person. She is a good sister, daughter and girlfriend. She is always there when you need her. I know I can always trust my sister. Just knowing that she will always be there is comforting to me.

Gina Michaud is 26 years old and lives in Methuen, MA. Currently, she is working towards her nursing degree here at NECC. Before taking Clare Thompson's Basic Writing course in the fall of 2000, she explained, "I never really liked writing, but now that I took this class, I have a better outlook on writing and it will help me later on. I like [writing] a lot more than I did. It's a lot more fun." Outside of work and school, Gina enjoys going to the gym and hanging out with her friends.

The Real Meaning of Friendship
by Andrea Heffernan

I was having one of those restless nights, tossing and turning as my nylon New Kids on the Block sleeping bag swished back and forth like the wind blowing through the trees. As I tried to get comfortable on the lightly padded carpeted floor, I was afraid to move, afraid to wake my friend Kim up. I was having the hardest time falling asleep. I could hear every owl hoot and every cricket chirp. I usually heard cars passing by and sirens in the distance, but Kim had moved to a quiet rustic neighborhood in Salem, New Hampshire, which seemed like it was hours away from Lawrence, Massachusetts when you are only eleven years old.

We were best friends, Kim and I, constantly at each other's houses, but this was one of the few times that I had slept at her new house. Just as my head sunk into my pillow and my eyes began to flutter shut, I began to hear footsteps and voices draw closer. As her parents made it to the side door located at the bottom of the stairs, I could hear them conversing. It was slightly muttered because of the light sleep I was in. Her mother kissed her father and said, "Have a nice day, Dear." After the door squeaked shut and the footsteps walked away, the house was engulfed with silence again.

Later that morning, we woke up to a typical New England summer day. Most of the day, Kim and I flew through the neighborhood on our bikes. Kim was aboard her pink and teal Huffy. I was aboard my purple Huffy with a unicorn on the banana seat. My brothers had ripped the basket off my bike and added mag wheels and pegs, so I could be seen riding with them. We were the coolest girls on wheels. Kim, wearing one of her interesting outfits, as usual, was a typical eleven-year-old in 1990. She had her tacky lime green bathing suit, the kind with the hole in the middle that makes them look like a bikini. She would always wear the same stonewashed jean shorts on top. Kim also wore these fuchsia jelly shoes that were molded to her feet. She was tall and a little plump with short dirty blonde hair that was disheveled from wind blowing through it. It was too short to pull back.

After lunch, we headed down to her basement where we listened to our favorite New Kids on the Block tape, and Kim got the greatest idea to hold a dance contest. We got all made-up with our denim skirts on and her mother's high heel shoes. We even made her brothers judge our dance contests. Kim and I were dancing to "Please Don't Go Girl" and feeling carefree. We heard the phone ring, but thought nothing of it. Kim turned the tape off as her mom came to the top of the stairs and said, "Kim, I have to run out for a little bit, Mr. Smith is coming over."

Kim instantly asked, "Where are you going?"

Her mother replied, "I'm going to get ice-cream for dessert."

Kim said, "There is ice-cream in the freezer."

Her mother then replied, "I will be back shortly."

The Smiths, Kim's neighbors, are those nosey neighbors that everyone had with the two very annoying children, one of which was forced to come over with the father. They were the type of family that had to have everything you had but better. Kim got a new pool and the next week, they needed to get a bigger one than she did.

Mr. Smith had suggested that we all go swimming in their pool until Kim's mom came back. Kim said, "For all I know, something could be wrong. My mother always tells me where she is going. I don't want to go swimming."

I told her, "Everything is fine. Let's just go swimming." Kim agreed with me. As we were changing into our bathing suits, my sister Lynn and her boyfriend Greg showed up to pick me up, even though I was supposed to sleepover Kim's house that night also. My sister told me that my parents had made plans to be somewhere and forgot, so I had to come home. I was reluctant to go and was very upset with my parents. I was sitting in my sister's car with tears running down my face. We pulled out of Kim's driveway and halfway down the street before I realized I had left my bike at Kim's house. I said, "Lynn, I forgot my bike. We have to go back."

She said, "We don't have time. You can just get it another time." I did not talk to them the whole way home.

When we arrived at my house, my parents had company, a lot more than usual, and because I was so upset with them, I stayed outside with my brothers. My oldest brother, Bobby, came up to me and said, "Did they tell you that Billy, Kim's dad, died?"

I instantly hollered at him saying, "That's not funny. How can you be so sick?"

He then replied, "Why do you think you had to come home? Mom and Dad would have let you stay there if we had to go somewhere."

I instantly ran in my house with tears flooding down my face and my Mom just held me. I noticed that I was not the only one crying. My Dad and all their friends were crying and what my brother had told me was reiterated. I instantly wanted to go back to Kim's house. I had told her that everything was fine, and suddenly it was not. I had always thought that only old people and really sick people died.

I had deceived my best friend. I had told her everything was going to be ok, and it was not. What was she going to do without a dad? I constantly found myself asking that question in the days following. I knew I had to be strong for her, even though I assured her that everything was fine. How was I going to face her at the wake and funeral? We were only eleven and carefree. How are we supposed to deal with death? Were we supposed to be learning a lesson?

I dreaded the day of the wake. I remember walking into the funeral parlor and feeling like I was going to pass out. There was a drastic temperature change from the hot August day to a cold and morbid funeral parlor. As I walked in, Kim immediately greeted me with a large hug. I learned that day that Kim did not expect me to be her inspiration and justify things for her. She just expected me to be her friend and be there for her.

From this moment on, I realized that life is precious. We were eleven years old, but we had grown so much. Not only had we learned the meaning of life and death, we also learned about true friendship and being there for each other through the good times and bad. You never know when your time may be up, so you have to live life to its fullest.

Andrea Heffernan is a 22-year-old resident of Lawrence, MA. Currently, she is a pharmacy technician and a nursing major at NECC. After taking Clare Thompson's Basic Writing course during the fall 2000 semester, Andrea feels more comfortable showing other people her work, and she has learned that she is "the queen of revision."

The Mystery and Chewing Gum
by Mayra Gomez

The first day of class after vacation, I got to school early, as I usually did the first day of class, to talk with my friends and meet my new classmates. This was my first year of high school and I was 15 years old. After a while of having arrived, I saw my friend, Franchesca, in the hall of the main office. I went to the hall to meet and chat with her. I said, "Hi Franchesca, how was your vacation?"

She replied, "Mine was good. How was yours?"

"I had fun. What are you doing here in the hall?"

"I'm here because I heard that there's a new math teacher and I wanted to find out if that's true, and it is."

"What! Are you serious?"

"Why would I be kidding? I also heard that he is not very nice. That he is rude."

"Oh my God, I'm lost. I wasn't doing good with the other one that was nice, now how am I going to do with this new one? Who told you all that? What happened with the other one?"

"I heard a conversation in the main office between other teachers. They were talking about the new teacher, who as they said is not very nice and also they said that the other one quit."

"Well, let's see how things come with the new teacher."

The time of the first period of class was approaching and usually the first class on the schedule was the math class. The 8 o'clock bell rang indicating that the time for going to class had approached. I was nervous about what Franchesca had told me about the new teacher. The classroom was quiet because by the time we got to there, everybody knew about the new teacher. After a while, the new teacher, named Paulo Alvares, entered into the classroom. He was a tall skinny man, with short black hair, a big head and brown eyes.

First of all, he introduced himself with an attitude of superiority and meanness saying, "Good morning. My name is Paulo Alvares and I want everyone absolutely quiet in the classroom, or you'll be penalized." From that instance, I knew that Franchesca was right about what she had heard about the teacher. The way he expressed himself was not very adequate. He didn't seem to be a teacher. I didn't like him at all from that moment. He did not seem to be a teacher because he came into the classroom with a bad attitude and a rude expression on his face.

After a while he stated his rules. He said, "Now it's time for you to know my three simple rules. First rule, I want everybody quiet, unless I give you permission to talk. Second rule, I want everybody seated straight on your chairs paying attention to me all the time. Third and last rule, I'm the teacher here and nobody can contradict what I say." After he finished stating his rules, everybody in the classroom was shocked and looked at each other. Nobody was able to look anywhere but his face, not even to make a movement or say anything after hearing his "simple rules" as he called them.

A while after that, he started to write on the board. That was the perfect moment to talk to my friend, Franchesca, who was seated next to me.

I asked her quietly, "Franchesca, do you like the new teacher?"

She replied, "I don't like him at all."

I asked her quietly, "Franchesca, do you like the new teacher?"

She replied, "I don't like him at all."

"Me neither, he is an animal. I have to do something bad to this teacher."

"Something like what?"

"I don't know yet, but I'll come up with something later on."

The teacher filled the board with words and numbers. After filling the board, he said, "I'm going to the main office for a while. As I said, I want everybody quiet and seated straight in the chairs." He walked out the door of the classroom. Everybody started to criticize the teacher's temper.

I turned to my friend, Franchesca, and told her, "Franchesca, this is my opportunity to do something bad to the teacher." I started thinking, and suddenly something really bad crossed through my head. I said, "Franchesca, I got it! I know what I'm going to do."

She anxiously asked me, "Tell me! Tell me! What are you going to do?"

"I can't tell you now, you'll see it when I do it."

"Ok, I hope you don't get in trouble."

I stood up cautiously and walked slowly to the teacher's chair. I was very nervous because I thought that the teacher could have entered in the classroom and caught me in the action. All my classmates were talking to each other. Nobody knew what I was going to do. Just my friend Franchesca knew I was going to do something, but she didn't have any idea of what it was. She didn't take her eyes away from me. I kept walking to the teacher's chair. As I got closer to the chair, I got more nervous. My legs were trembling as if they were cold. Finally, I got to the chair. I looked everywhere to make sure nobody was noticing what I was about to do. Nobody, except Franchesca, was looking at me.

I took a big sticky ball of chewing gum out of my mouth and put it on the teacher's chair. After putting it on the chair, I cautiously walked back to my seat. When I got to my seat, I got more nervous because my action was done and there was nothing I could do to revert it. I wanted to go back to the chair and take the chewing gum away from it, but my nervousness didn't let me. Sitting on my chair my body started to shake. I thought that I shouldn't have done that. Franchesca asked me, "Mayra are you alright? You are trembling."

"No, I'm not alright. I put chewing gum on the teacher's chair."

"What! Are you crazy?"

After a while, the teacher came back from the main office and said, "That's the way I like it, everybody quiet." As he walked to his chair, I was almost dying of nervousness. He sat on his chair.

In that moment I looked at Franchesca and said quietly, "Oh my God. I'm lost."

Then he stood in front of the board and continued writing. The big sticky ball of gum was no longer a ball; it was all over his pants and seemed that he couldn't wait to get to the bathroom to do biological necessities. Everybody started to laugh about it. Paulo Alvarez heard the laughing and screamed, "What's going on in here?"

One of my classmates said laughing, "Teacher you have chewing gum all over your pants!"

The teacher looked at his pants and said, "Whoever put chewing gum in my chair will be harshly penalized. I'm going to the principal's office."

From that moment I was terribly scared. I said to myself, "Oh my God! What am I going to do now? They are going to find out that I put the chewing gum on the teacher's chair. I'm lost."

After that, the teacher went down to the principal's office and both of them came back to the classroom. The principal asked, "Who put the chewing gum on the teacher's chair?" I didn't answer her question. I was too nervous to even talk. Having no answer to her question, the principal said, "Ok! If no one wants to say who did it, everybody will be penalized. All of you will have an 'F' in this class."

All of my classmates screamed, "No that's not fair! You can't do that!" They were all very angry because they didn't know who did it and they thought they were going to be punished.

One of my classmates said, "Whoever put the chewing gum on the teacher's chair say it now. We can't all pay for something one of you did."

I was going to talk, but my friend, Franchesca, said, "Don't say anything. They can't do that to the whole class."

Finally, the same day the principal made a meeting with our whole class and our parents and the teacher. She explained the situation to our parents. She told them that one of us had put chewing gum on the teacher's chair. Our parents were amazed with what had happened. I could see on their faces how embarrassed they were. She told our parents the resolution she had come up with. She told them that the whole class would have an 'F' in the class. Our parents didn't agree with her because they thought it wasn't fair that everybody had to pay for someone else's fault. I was so afraid because I thought that they were going to find out that I was the one who put the chewing gum on the teacher's chair.

We had the opportunity to say how rude the teacher was. We told the principal how the teacher's attitude was since the beginning and the way he talked to the whole class. After saying how the teacher's attitude was, he said, "I was going to try to change it." He also said that he hoped this action wouldn't be done again.

The principal realized that she couldn't punish the whole class and everything was left without punishment.

After the meeting, all our parents went home and we went back to the classroom. The teacher showed a different attitude towards the whole class. He was very calm and treated us as students, not as animals as he had done before.

When I got home my mother asked me, "Mayra, did you know who put the chewing gum on the teacher's chair?"

"Yes mom! I knew it."

"You should say something when the principal asked," my mother said. I told my mother that I was afraid and nervous so I didn't say anything.

From that experience, I learned that not only putting the chewing gum on the teacher's chair was wrong, but also we should always tell the truth because somebody else could be penalized for my bad action. I also learned to have a little more patience and not to act so hastily, in as much as I regretted my action as soon as I committed it.

Mayra Gomez, 22, of Lawrence, took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course in the summer of 2000. She has always liked writing, but "now I know how to write better." A business management major, Mayra also enjoys listening to music.

A Tragedy
by Jean Chen

It was on that Sunday, right after Christmas in 1992. The air was frozen and the snow covered all the land. My sister-in-law, Eileen, and I were shopping for bathing suits at the Burlington Mall in Massachusetts that afternoon. She and my brother-in-law, S.J., and their adopted six-year-old boy, Ahn-Ahn, were going to Cancun, Mexico on December 30 for a New Year's vacation. We lived in the same town, Andover, and close to each other. Our two families had dinner together that evening at my house and pre-celebrated for the coming new year.

The phone rang in the middle of that night; my father was on the other end in Taiwan. This was the first time my father had called me in 14 years since I moved to Amercia and it also was the first time I had heard him cry in his life. "Jean, your mother is in the hospital now. I think she is about to die. You better come home as soon as possible or you might not see her again."

I replied, "Please don't cry, Daddy. Everything will be all right and I will be home as soon as I get a ticket."

I left my eight-year-old son with my husband and took and afternoon plane the next day. It took almost 22 hours from Boston to Taipei, Taiwan. I was extremely tired from the jet lag and regret; Sorrowfully, I thought I was coming to the end of the world. I went home and saw my handicapped father in his wheelchair. His blind eyes were brimming with tears. Everybody, including myself, had predicted that he would die before my mother; but, last year, she was diagnosed with uterine cancer in a final stage condition, which was a big surprise to everyone. Words could not express our feelings at this moment. I hugged my father and then left for my mother.

The hospital was never a pleasant place to visit; a lot of lives were saved there, but they would all come back and end there eventually. Last year I was there with my mother for surgery and chemotherapy treatment. With all the hope in our hearts, we had tried every effort to cure. We all know that nobody can ever escape from his destiny, but our life is full of desire, especially for a long life without ending.

I walked into the room, which was surrounded by all kinds of machines. There, in the center, on a metal made bed was my thin and sickly mother. She was connected to a breathing machine and there was a young nurse trying to feed her with another machine. A medicine dropper was hanging on a stand with a needle inserted into her left arm; a bag of urine with blood in it was hanging out on one side of the bed. An electrocardiogram machine was over on the side.

I ran over to my mother and held her hand, "Oh, Mama. It's me. I am here now." The young nurse whispered to me, "She cannot hear you. The cancer cells have eaten to her brain. She is unconscious now."

"Oh, no," I cried out loud. The nurse came over and patted me on the shoulder. I took the night shift to watch my mother at the hospital. Every night, there were some critical moments that had perturbed and shaken me greatly. The feelings were mixed and the minds were conflicted. Rationally, I didn't know why we were still trying to save my mother when she had lost her brain; I didn't believe that she would want to suffer like this. But the doctor addressed this issue. He said, "This is a question of morality. As long as she is breathing, we considered that she is alive and will try our effort to keep her alive; unless you want to move her home." I had my mind as confused as a tangled skein.

Besides the critical situation, night seemed so long and never ended. I was sitting there holding my mother's hand and talking to her and wishing she might hear me magically. Sometimes, I tried to read the sutra, which I believed might bring her to a good new life, or I would just sit there and wish that I could die for her suddenly.

The phone rang unexpectedly around four o'clock the morning of January 4, 1993. It was my father. "Jean, something happened and it's really bad." His voice was terrified and shaken.

"What, Daddy? What?" I looked down to my mother who was still breathing; I couldn't imagine anything worse than now.

"Your husband just called from Boston and said your brother-in-law and the whole family were in a bus accident. It sounded very terrible. I think you should come home and give him a call," my father said seriously.

I reached home about 5:00am and called my husband in Andover immediately. "What happened, my dear?" I asked nervously.

"They were on a tour bus with 52 people in it for sightseeing in Cancun, Mexico. The bus crashed into a high-voltage electricity transformer and killed 25 people. They were included," my husband answered powerlessly.

"What? Who died and who remained?" I wanted to know badly.

"All of them!" my husband cried out, heartbroken.

"Oh, my God! No, it couldn't be. That is impossible. Three of them?" I tried to get a bargain from this. At least one should remain anyone. I heard my husband weeping on the other side. "Have you told your parents yet?" I remembered that S.J. had mentioned visiting them in Los Angeles on the way back from vacation.

"How could I do that?" my husband cried harder. "They are so old and the deep affection they have for him might kill them. I have too much to face already. I don't know what to do." Then he told me that many of the bodies were burned in the crash and he had sent their dental records for identification. I told him I would try to get home as soon as possible, just like I had told my father before.

I held the telephone for a long while as all the memories about my brother-in-law were running around in my head indefatigably. I met S.J. Chen 14 years ago when we came to this country. He was the one who applied for our citizenship. He came to America as a pioneer. He became a professor at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell where he was head of the Plastic Engineering Department. He was the co-founder of a New Hampshire Company that makes dispensers for adhesives. He was a leader in his field with a distinguished reputation. He was highly respected by people around him because of his humble manner and kindness.

He was also the pride of his parents and a role model for his family members. Fifteen years ago, he wanted his family to move to America and he started to apply for

them. He helped everybody until they settled down. He used patience, virtue and discipline that are central to the Buddhist religion. He had a good marriage with his wife, Eileen, who couldn't have a baby on her own. They adopted Ahn-Ahn six years ago from Taiwan and became a perfect family.

I hung up the telephone and started to think about this critical situation with my mother on one side and my husband on the other. I was really torn in between. My father's voice came from somewhere. He said, "You should go back to Boston now. Your mother has your brother and me, but your husband is alone now. He needs your help." I knew I wouldn't see my mother in my life from this point. My tears fell like rain.

While I sat in the taxi on the way back to my mother for a farewell, I thought all about this morning. Eileen's words came to mind, "We all think that separation in life and parting at death are the bitterest sorrows in the course of human life. But if we really understand about the truth of nature, then we would accept that life has its own discipline. Life and death were just two sides of one thing; each complements the other. A totally mindful person should see a door between life and death and should walk in and out easily." To this moment, I could confirm that when the accident happened, S.J. and Eileen were facing it fearlessly and Ahn-Ahn as innocent and happy as an angel; they should depart as easily as walking through a door. The night after they ate dinner at my house, we said goodbye to each other. Didn't we?

When I came to my mother, I realized that she has taught me more with her own life. She became an orphan in her teens, took care of her siblings, married a crippled man and had to live with his big family all her life. She never went to school, but if I can find words to describe a good soul from a book, I can find from her acting courageous, honest, lenient and conscientious. She always greeted people with a smile and a friendly nod of the head and she always gave me more than she was asked to give. She had completed her mission of life completely.

"Until we meet again, Mama." I hugged her and said, "I bid you farewell."

I heard my mother reply silently, "Go, my dear, go with my forever love."

Jean Chen was a student in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course during the spring of 2001. Before taking this course, Jean felt she was "poor with English." After completing Joanna's course, Jean is still a little unsure of her writing ability, but she feels as though a "door within seems open a little more now." Jean lives in Andover, MA, with her family and loves to read, cook and go for walks.

A Story about Mini-Skirts[1]
by Nancy Henry

It was an early Saturday morning in 1966. That day I had just turned 16. While I was sleeping soundly in my room, I seemed to hear a knock at the door and it awakened me from sleep. With my eyes closed, I tried to touch the alarm clock on the end table next to my bed. As I looked closely to read the time, it was 8 a.m. "Oh my God!" I said to myself. Suddenly, I jumped up from my bed. That day I was supposed to take my sisters, Susie and Kim, to board a merchant ship to visit two of my customers whom I met at my father's tailor shop: John, the captain of the Five Star Merchant Ship, and Alan, his mate.

"My dear, wake up!" That was my mother's sweet voice from outside my room. "I made your favorite beef bun this morning," she said.

I put on my bathrobe and grabbed a bottle of my acne medicine from the dressing table. Rushing downstairs, I attempted to occupy the only bathroom in the household before my sisters, Susie and Kim, who were always ahead of me.

When I passed through the dining room, I saw the entire family was sitting at the table. It seemed like they were waiting for me. I stopped moving ahead and started stepping backwards because I wanted to find out why they all were sitting together at the same table. This was an unusual picture of breakfast at my home!

My parents smiled at me. "Good morning. Happy Birthday!" Dad said. "Sweet sixteen! We hope you have a wonderful year at this age." He pointed to the gift-wrapped package sitting on the corner of the cadenza and said, "This is for you."

"Oh, thank you. May I take a quick shower first?" I asked. "Never mind. I would like to open it now." As soon as I saw my sister, Kim, with an impatient facial expression, I changed my mind quickly. She sighed while she rolled her eyes. Suddenly I had a strong feeling of knowing this package must be an unusual gift; I could see their faces filled with anticipation waiting for me to open my gift. I started cautiously to unfasten the fuschia ribbon and unwrap the pretty glossy baby-blue paper. "Oh! Thank you! This is a beautiful sweater. Oh, wow! I got two mini-skirts!" I said. I couldn't believe my parents actually allowed me to wear mini-skirts from that time on. I was thrilled for the gift of acceptance far beyond the gift of mini-skirts. My parents had been strict and prohibited their daughters from wearing scanty clothes and dating before the age of twenty.

That was one of the reasons why I didn't tell my parents about making a visit on the ship that had twenty men (and only men) on board. I had to use the excuse of helping out at a fund raising event for the school. My sisters, Susie and Kim, who were two and three years older than me, secretly planned that we would all meet at the street corner that was one block from our house. The meeting time was set at 10 a.m. Susie suggested that we should dress casually.

When I met my sisters at the appointed place, both of them were surprised to see that I had my silk blouse and my new mini-skirt on. They were dressed in jeans and knit tops. I certainly made them feel uneasy by overdressing myself on such an occasion. I never considered how to dress appropriate for the occasion at the time. The only thing on my mind was the excitement of being able to wear a new mini-skirt like my peers.

"Would you like to run home to change?" Kim suggested.

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[1] Due to the extreme length of Nancy's piece, what appears here is an abridged version of the original.

"No, I don't have time for this." I used this for an excuse because I was afraid of Dad's confrontation.

"I knew you would say no. You always want to show off your legs to people," Susie said in a critical tone. "Well, let's call a taxi now." She waved at an oncoming taxi. I gave her a nasty look. She was the one who always tried to control everything.

As we arrived at the Saigon River bank, we saw Alan was waiting at the appointed site. I introduced my sisters to him. He was a tall good-looking young man. His body form was like an athlete's with muscle tone and healthy bronze skin. My sisters and I were fond of him very much. He took us to a little Asian boat (sampan), which was especially reserved for us. Alan said that the merchant ship was parked in the middle of the water due to the crowded condition of the dock. Therefore, we needed to use the sampan to transfer us to the big ship. He also told us that The Five Star was completely renovated eight months ago. I was anxious to board and visit the facilities on the ship.

As I tried to step into the boat, I had a hard time because of the tightness of my mini-skirt. Alan helped me by lifting up my whole body and putting me down in the boat. My face blushed. I was embarrassed for the awkward situation. After I was placed in the sampan, I felt insecure because I discovered the sampan operator was a fragile little old man, who seemed to be at least over seventy years old, and his helper was his ten-year-old son.

As the old man started to row the boat toward the ship, I closed my eyes and prayed to reach our destination on time. Susie whispered in my ear and said, "I wonder if you would dare wear a short skirt again for another occasion like this?"

"Shhh. Be quiet. You are annoying me," I snapped back at her.

While I was continuously praying, I heard Alan say, "We are here. Please board one-by-one carefully."

On the deck, almost the entire crew was standing there in one row with their hands crossed in the back in the upright position. They were all dressed casually in navy blue sweat pants and visors that had The Five Star logo. Some of them had orange sleeveless T-shirts on, while the others were bare with no tops. We received an unforgettable welcome from our friend. The captain was the only one wearing a uniform on the ship. He and Alan gave us the best tour of the ship, starting from the engine room and ending with the gym room. It was amazing to see a ship could be built with so many facilities in it, just like a city block.

The time had come to say farewell to our friends. I was still overwhelmed by the excitement of this wonderful visit. A few guys had commented that they liked my mini-skirt. Alan said, "It looks so cute on you! You have the right figure to wear this type of skirt." Instantly, I felt a sense of satisfaction—I knew that I had made the right decision to wear the short skirt, regardless of the improper environment.

As we started to disembark the ship, Alan and my sister went down first, then from the sampan he stretched out one of his hands and guided me to jump into the little boat. I tried to stretch one foot onto the sampan and then the other stayed on the ship's floating ladder. Suddenly, a heavy wave knocked against the ladder, and I had a hard time withdrawing my left foot because of the mini-skirt. I lost my balance and my whole body fell into the water. At the beginning, I was calm even though I did not know how to swim. All I did was hold my breath and close my eyes. Then a high wave dashed me on the edge of the ship. At first, I felt my body still floating in the water, but then another

merciless, heavy wave hit me again, and at that time I felt my body sinking, and heard a bubble sound lingering over my head. Then there was another noisy sound like a military helicopter flying in the direction of my left ear. I faintly heard people talking in a panicked tone on the ship. I heard things like:

"Quick, someone go to the end of the ship. Catch her!"

"Please stay away!"

"Lew, get the medical aid box."

"Oh my God! Please do not let it happen."

"Oh God! Please don't let her die. She doesn't know how to swim," my sister, Susie, cried out.

Quickly, the word of death gave me an ominous thought: what would happen to me if I was thrown farther away from the ship and gobbled up by the sharks or whatever? Following this thought, I heard a splash sound in the water. One of the crewmen plunged himself into the water spot where I fell. Another man ran toward the other end of the ship. In a few seconds, I felt one of my legs was grabbed by someone. I started to panic and turned my body to struggle with the gripping hand. I accidentally touched the bare back of the rescuer. I vigorously moved my arms in the water and attempted to hold his hand, but I made the situation worse because I scratched the rescuer's left eye with my sharp fingernails. I ripped his $800 Omega watch off from his wrist. To make it worse, it had been given to him by his wife as a first anniversary gift.

Finally, the man made a great effort using his arms wrapped around me, and pulled me away from the ship. At the same time, the other man swam from the end of the ship and both sandwiched me and lifted me up on the ship. Both of my sisters' eyes filled with tears. They ran toward me and embraced me tightly.

"Are you okay? You really scared us," Kim asked.

"I am freezing! I need some sun," my voice quivered.

The captain, John, sighed and was relieved. They dried me and wrapped me around with a wool blanket. My sister, Sue, handed me a set of man's clothes that Alan gave her. "Well, it's too bad you can't wear the skirt all day," she said.

"I bet one of your fat legs won't fit in my mini-skirt," I finally let my anger out on her because of her constant immature attacks.

"How dare you would say such a thing to me!" Following her screaming, streams and streams of tears gushed out from her eyes. At the same time, I saw Alan walking towards us, unnoticing Susie's crying situation. He wrapped his arms around the both of our shoulders and then said to me, "I was so grateful to God that you were out of danger and now reunited with your sisters. Susie was very worried about you and she was crying the whole time during your rescue operation." I buried my face in my freezing hands. Additional guilt struck against me. I didn't believe that I had made three serious mistakes on that day—my birthday. 1.) I lied to my parents. 2.) I caused a lot of troubles because of my idiotic decision to wear the mini-skirt. 3.) I really hurt my sister's feelings with an insulting comment.

"I am very sorry. I didn't mean it. Please forgive me," I said that from my heart.

Then she said, "It is okay this time. If you say it again next time, I myself will push you off into the water." We both laughed and hugged each other.

"Hurry up! I'll go down with you to find a place to change. They want to put your clothes in the dryer right now," she grasped my arm and started to walk downstairs.

I put on some baggy sweat pants and a flannel shirt. As I walked up to the deck, my friends at the ship clapped their hands and came up to shake my hand for the successful rescue. That was an embarrassing scene. The clothes and flip-flops I was wearing and my hair was in a mess. I just looked like a fool!

Later I was told that their ship would have been retained in this country for criminal investigation if a fatal death happened during that length of period. God knows how much time and money it would have cost. The ship company would have been fined for thousands and thousands of dollars. The pathetic man, who had rescued me, told me that I was very close to the ship's propeller when I was under the water. I would have become "meat paste" if I did dash into it. I thought instantly, no wonder that I heard a sound like a helicopter-flying close by me. I am thankful to God for laying mercy upon me and letting me still live to have a wonderful life.

We finally returned to the riverbank safely at sunset. For the second disembarkment, I changed my attire from silk top/mini-skirt to silk top/sweat pants. The fear and guilty feeling still existed inside of me. My sister comforted me by saying that the fault attributed to my mini-skirt and encouraged me to forget about it. I have learned a great lesson through this ordeal and that is to do things practically. No more mini-skirts. Because of my vanity for a mini-skirt, I had caused great damages, such as injuring a friend's eye, depriving him of his sentimental gift which was given by his lovely wife, the great risk of both men's lives for rescuing me, and the unnecessary anxieties that I had created for everyone during this visit. I decided to put my new mini-skirts inside my keepsake trunk.

However, the most priceless lesson that my sister and I had learned from the incident is how to mutually respect each other and share our relationship like old time friends.

Nancy Henry was a student in Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing course during the spring of 2001. Before taking Mary's course, Nancy said, "I never made much effort in writing because it was hard for me to write." Now, Nancy feels her writing skills are "getting better and stronger." Nancy plans to major in English here at NECC. In fact, she likes writing so much that some day she would like to be a writing tutor at the NECC Writing Center! When not in school, Nancy likes to read, play the piano and spend time with her husband and their two daughters, ages 21 and 23.

My Job
by Wendy Rivera

I wanted to continue my education. However, I didn't save enough money for my college career, so I look through many ads looking for jobs with good benefits. I even prepared to take an ASVAB test to go into the army, but I didn't get the mandatory test score. The Sergeant told me I needed to work on my word knowledge, math, and reading comprehension. That basically covers the whole test. I finally came across a popular company that pays for your college tuition. There are many of these companies worldwide. You might see their own label van in your neighborhood delivering merchandise to their customers. This popular company is called UPS, which is associated with the post office team.

I filled out an application a week before I was hired. I was hired on June 14, 1999. I was very excited the day I received the phone call. Most of my family warned me about the safety at UPS, but the other part of me was content to start a part-time job while attending college. I had to show up at Human Resources to fill out legal paperwork such as income tax forms. I had no interview. I chose to work the midnight shift that starts at 11:15 p.m. and ends at 3 or 4 a.m. depending on how smoothly or roughly the work is moving.

The first week I sat a desk with many co-workers. There were about 15-20 adults my age. Our advisor, Marco Mendez, was preparing us to start our jobs the correct way to avoid injuries. First of all, he was showing us a film about how UPS started. Then, he was explaining to us how several areas run, and was demonstrating how to pick up a box correctly to avoid back injuries. He gave all of us a pamphlet showing us different kinds of stretching exercises to perform before we begin unloading. The first week was a preparation of what was ahead of us.

The second week, I was well prepared for starting my duty. I had to unload boxes from a truck and I had to deal with humid weather. There is heat in the building, but the doors of the building are always open and the small gaps in between the trucks prevent the heat from maintaining inside the building so I have to suffer throughout all the seasons. During the winter I am covered with many layers while I am shivering, and during the summer I am covered with less layers while sweating. For the first thirty days I was watched by a trainer, whose name was Denise. He was watching me to see if I was unloading correctly. I received much feedback. My assigned trainer said, "You are not bending your knees while picking up a box. You are not watching the walls up ahead of you while unloading, and you are not using a loadstand when the walls of boxes are greater than your shoulder level." The first couple of weeks were tough, but I was destined to improve my strength and judgement.

My job is to pick up boxes or bulks and put them on a moving conveyor belt. They could weigh as much as 145 lbs. If the box weighs more than 70 lbs., it is considered overweight. My responsibility is to get the overweight boxes off the conveyor belt, and place it where a towing truck would take it to its final destination. I normally leave it inside the truck or I find a strong partner. While bending my knees, the most amount of weight that I could lift is 70-75 lbs. When I first began lifting that amount of weight, I would feel a tremendous burn in my legs, which is normal. I would feel my blood circulating in all parts of my legs. If the bulk is more than 80 lbs., I lean my body

toward the conveyor belt and lean my body weight towards the box to try and get it on the moving belt.

There have been times when I have gotten hurt. One particular dilemma occurred after 3-4 months of being employed in UPS. I was unloading at a fast pace and not visualizing my surroundings. I was sitting at an uncomfortable spot. I had to lay my head towards my knees while sitting on a step that is inside the truck. Above me was a roller made out of metal. I lifted my head so quick that I didn't think of the deadly consequence; as a result, I bumped my head against the metal bar and started bleeding instantly. I ran towards the emergency kit to get a Band-Aid. I wasn't in pain. I just needed to stop the bleeding. My supervisor gave me a clean towel, and he called several of his bosses. They pulled me outside the building to check the injury. One of them recommended I get stitches because it was deep. His name was Paul and he was the manager in charge of the whole building. I had to wait until I was off from work. According to their policy, it wasn't an emergency. I went to the emergency room the same morning. I had to wait long dreading hours in the emergency room with a Band-Aid in the corner of my forehead.

The next day when I returned to work I had to wear a Band-Aid on my injury to prevent further infection. One of my co-workers asked me, "How many stitches did you get?"

I wasn't sure because I was so tired that day. So I just said, "I got about 4 stitches."

My supervisor said, "Wendy you need to attend a safety meeting due to your injury." The meeting was to remind all co-workers, who have gotten hurt while working, to always use safety precautions to avoid injuries.

I learned many things on this job. I have become more alert to my surroundings and have added strength capacity in my daily life. It is almost going to be my 2nd year anniversary. I am going to be rewarded with an increase in my salary and congratulated by my co-workers and boss. One thing that I will always keep in mind is that no matter how complex and severe my job can be, I will always use my safety goals to avoid injuries. For example, sometimes I go over my limit, just to have others admire me for my strength. I am not going to risk my safety to satisfy others. I am going to listen to my limits. I have seen many people come and go throughout my time here. I am still part of this team while all the people in my orientation crew have quit. I am not going to retire until I graduate in my major, which is computer science. Therefore, I am going to help this company grow while it's supporting my college career.

Wendy Rivera, of Lawrence, was worried about taking Basic Writing, but is content with finishing the course taught by Clare Thompson, spring 2001. Wendy enjoys lifting weights, riding her bike and other outdoor activities.

What a Nice Job!
by Ruth B. Tejada

I was desperately looking for which would be my first job because I had already done the high school and I wanted to be occupied in something, so I told some friends that I needed a job. One of them recommended me with an owner of a company whom was a prominent lawyer. This lawyer had opened a new office and needed a secretary. My friend called me and told me that he had made an appointment with that lawyer for the current day. I was excited and nervous. I went to the appointment with that lawyer for the current day. I was excited and nervous. I went to the appointment. The receptionist at the front desk, Altagracia, was very nice and friendly with me. As soon as I passed into Mr. Dominguez's office, he started to ask me questions about my knowledge. After this he offered me a coffee and some cookies. The first impression of him was that he was a little strict, but a friendly person. He told me that I had to take a two days training and after that he would decide to hire me or not.

I thought the training would be hard and difficult, but it wasn't; I enjoyed it a lot. It was so nice to work with so many young people, all doing their job, but at the same time talking about themselves and making jokes. Sara taught me how to answer the phone in a nice way and to book appointments; Jose taught me to organize papers in their specific files, Tony taught to solve problems that I would handle later in my job. He also told me that our boss had good and bad days and I must be prepared for it. The training lasted from 8 in the morning to 5 p.m. Before closing the boss told that he needed some personal papers from me, so when they closed, Mr. Dominguez took me to my house to pick up the papers. I didn't say any word during the way home because I thought that he was a strict person and I didn't want to bother him. He seemed to be nice, but you never know.

The second day was better than the first day. It was funnier and happier than any other day. I met much more people and I learned some other tips such as the rules of the company. The accountant, Freddie, showed me how to organize the account books; Mabel taught me how to deal with trouble customers. At around 3:30 p.m. the boss called to his office and told me that he would let me along in the office to check how much I had learned. I started to bite my nails. I thought that it would be terrible, but the coworkers encourage me to go and do it by telling me that they knew that it would be easy for me because I was intelligent.

As soon as I passed into the office he ordered me to have a seat and to take some notes. He dictated me a long and boring letter, gave me some instructions and left the room. The phone rang; it was a customer really mad because somebody in that office had made a mistake in one of his papers. I just told the person to hold on, and I started to think about what they had taught me. I went straight to the files and found the name of the person. Then I talked to him again and asked for the mistake; he told me that his first

and last name was misspelled. I told him to bring a photo ID, but the person refused to do it.

Something that I learned pretty well was that the legal procedures always need a photo ID to be fixed. So I told him that it was the only way to do it and he offered some money, but I warn him that he was breaking the rules and that it was unlawful in that office. Then he insisted and I mentioned the court and he hanged up the phone. I would never forget the moment when the phone rang again; it was the same person telling me that I had passed the test. The person was the accountant of the company. Then everybody came into the office and making a big noise, hugged me and told me congratulations.

The next day I went to the new office that Mr. Dominguez had opened. It was a beautiful place. I was a little confused because I didn't see anybody inside the place, only the housekeeper cleaning. I hurried to ask her if it was Mr. Dominguez's office, she smiling answered me that it was, but he hadn't arrived yet. I started to talk to her. This lady, whose name is Carmen, talked to me as if she had known me her whole life. I remember Carmen as a talkative person.

The boss arrived at 9 a.m. and told me that I was going to work in isolation without any other partner, which made me sad because he was in charge of two offices at the same time. The solitude was the only problem of this job. When I say solitude I refer to the missing coworkers. But the customers, whom came and called all the time, later were my friends. They were most of the time nice with me, and almost no one gave me a hard time while working in this place. However, there were a couple of them that enjoyed giving me a hard time, but I learned to deal with them. It is kind of unbelievable that of the most difficult customers was later one of my best friends.

My typical day started at 8 a.m. when I used to open the office with my boss. At 9 a.m., I had set up all the papers and files, most of the customers started to come at this time. They asked for information of specific legal papers, sometimes they needed letters, and sometimes they just needed to photocopy any paper. When they asked for legal procedures I just had to call the boss. He was in charge of it because he was the lawyer. At noon was my break to go home and eat something, take a shower and return to work at 2 p.m., then work until 6 p.m. I had busy and busier days, but all good days thanks to the customers. The Sunday was my only day off.

I will always remember that I expected a little fear the bad day of my boss, until my friend, Tony, of the other office, whom told me that Mr. Dominguez had bad days, called and told me, "Ruth, you know what? I was joking when I told you that Mr. Dominguez had bad days. There is a joke that I do with every person that starts to work here." I wanted to kill him because I had four weeks of terror every time the boss opened the door in the morning time and look at him waiting to tell me something with bad attitude or in a bad way.

After all, it was a nice job with a lot of good opportunities, which were a kind of challenge for me. It helped me to grow as a person. Even though some friends critiqued this job because it was sometimes boring. I never felt bad about it because I know that they did that just to bother me. This job was my second home no matter what the rest of the people thought about it.

I learned from this job to be polite no matter what even on bad days. The solitude helped me think well and to be a little more mature. The relationship with Carmen

helped me understand talkative people. I also learned to be on time everywhere. But the best thing I learned was to deal with all types of people, which helped in other jobs that after this I had. I learned to work hard and to love work. It was the beginning of my social-adult life. Every time I deal with unknown people I think about what I learned from my first job. Never discuss with people whom think they know everything because you will never end, just let them still think they know everything even though you know what they state is wrong. Respect every person as the important human beings that they are. Never make deals by telephone with people you don't know because you may pay the error. From my boss I learned to be responsible and to tell always the truth. He always told me that if you tell a lie you have to tell another to cover the first and then another to cover the second and another to cover the other and the people finally will know you are lying.

Ruth B. Tejada, 22, from the Dominican Republic, found writing to be "really frustrating" since English is her second language, before taking Basic Writing with Joanna Fortna, spring 2001. Ruth feels more confident now with her writing and enjoys listening to music, dancing, and surfing the web.

Pumping Gas
by Scott Wood

I was 14 years old when I started my first job. I wasn't planning on working at this young age. I asked my parents to buy me a new bike and they told me if I wanted a new bike I had to find a part-time job. My parents explained to me that they didn't have the extra money to spend on a bicycle. So, if I wanted a bike, I'd better find a job. I began to look for a job around town but Georgetown is a small town, and I couldn't find anybody hiring. I decided to hitchhike to Haverhill and start applying for work there.

I stopped in a Sunoco Gas Station because they had a help wanted sign in the window. I asked the attendant working if the manager was in. He replied, "He's in the back room." I went into the back office to speak to the manager. He sat me down and asked how he could help me. I told him I needed a job because there was a bicycle I really wanted to buy and my parents couldn't afford it. Dick, the manager, asked me how old I was and I told him 14.

Dick then asked me what hours I was willing to work. "I can work any hours on the weekend because it doesn't interfere with school," I said. "I can also work anytime when school ends in the summer."

"How will you get from Georgetown to Haverhill?" asked Dick.

"My parents will give me a ride," I responded.

Dick had me fill out an application and said he would call me with an answer in a couple of weeks. I was looking forward to his call.

The phone rang about a week later; it was Dick informing me I had the job. He told me I could start training the weekend coming up. I was getting nervous because I never had a job before. I didn't know what to expect. I wasn't sure if the other employees were nice or if they would mind a kid working with them. I started that Friday night. I was training with an older gentleman. He began showing me how the gas pumps worked. I figured that was easy enough to learn.

The gentleman training me was named John. "Let me explain a few things to you son," he said. "When you're pumping someone's gas, also wash their windshields, and check their oil. If it gets real busy, always remember to keep a watchful eye on the pumps."

I made sure I listened very carefully because I knew he could teach me a great deal. John was a very pleasant man with a terrific sense of humor. He would tell jokes between customers. He told me that he liked working with kids better than adults. He felt he was accomplishing more teaching the younger kids how to prepare for life in the real world.

He explained that I'm responsible for the end of the night receipts. I was a little nervous being responsible for the money, and credit cards at the end of the shift. What happens if I have a drive out? Would I still have to account for the money missing? He told me to only take care of as many people at the same time I feel comfortable with. After a couple of weekends I was working on my own. I was working Friday and Saturday nights, 6 p.m. – 12 a.m.

I enjoyed working outside meeting new people. There were some instances though that I wasn't happy. The customers sometimes would get to me when it was real busy. One time I remember it was the Friday night of a July 4th weekend. I had this one

customer that wanted his tire pressure checked. I told him I couldn't do it now because it was so busy. He got out of his car and started making a scene. "I'm buying your gas so check my tires now."

I tried to explain to him, "I don't have the time right now." But he didn't want to listen. He told me he would inform the manager of my actions.

Unfortunately, my first experience with an unhappy customer made a lasting impression on me. The customer changed my attitude from good to bad. If a customer would ask me to wash his windshield, I would tell him in a snappy voice, "I'm too busy for that." After I thought about what had happened that night, I realized my job meant a lot to me. Why should I let some idiot ruin it for me?

When the owner came in the next day, I sat down with him and explained what had happened. He accepted my apology and told me I would probably have many more days like that but shouldn't let it get to me.

A typical day on the job would be just to pump gas and check oil. It would make the day drag because people wouldn't take the time to chat or say, "Hi, how are you?" People would just say, "$5 please," and that would be the end of the conversation. I even tried to make conversation most people just didn't want to be bothered.

I remember the happiest time on the job. I was very slow at the pumps and this older lady came in to get some gas. I asked her, "How I may help you?"

She replied, "I need $5 worth of gas but also could you do me a favor?" She told me she was handicapped and would appreciate it if I could help her to the bathroom. I told her I would be more than happy to help her. I collected the money for the gas and told her to move to the right side of the building.

I asked her how she wanted me to help her. She explained that she needed help getting into the wheelchair that was located in the back seat. I took the chair out and helped her from the car to the chair. I pushed the wheelchair into the bathroom and helped her to the toilet. I waited for about 10 minutes and she yelled that she was all set. I helped her back to her car and she thanked me very much. She asked, "What is your name young man?"

I said, "Scott Wood." Then she left without another word.

One day my boss came to me and gave me an envelope. I asked, "What is it?"

He replied, "I don't know. A lady dropped it off."

I opened the envelope and it was a savings bond for $500. I looked at who signed it. It just said, "Mary." I was lost for a couple of moments then I remembered I helped a lady about a month ago named Mary. There was no return address or anything else that would give me information on how to get a hold of her to thank her. I was happy. This experience proved to me that if you take the time to help someone you would get rewarded in the end.

I kept this job until I was 21. I learned so much about people just by talking to them and listening. The job was a big help to me dealing with people in general. I learned that there are all types of people in the world. I think it was a good learning experience to work at a gas station and see all types of life.

Scott Wood lives in Haverhill with his wife and two children. He is aiming for a career in law enforcement and enjoys fixing cars and collecting hockey cards. He was in Mary O'Neil's summer 2000, Basic Writing course.

Day Labor
by David Thibeault

There was a time, back in the 80s, when I needed "Beer Money." It was only about $60 that I needed to round off my budget for the month. I had only two options. One option was to sell drugs (Pot). The other option was to get up at 5a.m. and walk down to the local day labor office in Nashua, New Hampshire, sign-in, and stand around for an hour or two hoping to get noticed as someone who is relatively intelligent and not under the influence of illegal recreational substances. My conscience reduced these options to only one.

I felt like crap the first time I walked into the Day Labor office, surrounded by losers and now freshly one of them, but the alternative was unacceptable. I knew I was in for a hard day's work, and I had serious doubts about my ability to do physical labor due to a longstanding heart condition.

Getting picked out of the crowd of hopheads I found myself in by the second most cantankerous bastard I'd ever seen was not a problem. Two hours later, I found myself with a shovel in my hand, in a ditch, with a brand new appreciation of the words "Granite State." Over the next few years, I found out that New Hampshire really is full of granite, and for the minimum wage, I moved tons of it. Every day was the same thing. It did not matter whether it was pick and shovel or drywall or concrete. It was all heavy and picking it up and moving it was all I was required to do.

The day labor crowd has its own social rules, usually the taking of some form of mind-altering substance and not working hard because it makes everyone else look bad. Minding my own business was another rule to adhere to. Needless to say, my heart was not broken. Usually I worked with Jeff or Twofingers (don't ask) who drank all day long and thought I was a goody two shoes because I only drank one or two beers at lunch. Drinking at lunch made me barely acceptable to most of the guys, but the hard-core drugees never did fully trust me. We got along pretty good because they knew I pulled my own weight and didn't care about their herbal consumption.

On one of the good/bad days, and they were all good/bad days, I watched one of my bosses smoke two bowls of pot at lunch, go back to work, climb up a tree with a chainsaw, and cut the top half of the tree in such a way as to drop it directly onto the roof of a four-car garage. The four-car garaged was attached to a $400,000 condominium.

Six and ½ minutes later, I was on the other side of the construction-site, in a ditch, doing my best to pretend I had been there all-day and claiming no knowledge of Pot Head Activity. Otherwise, I would have to explain to the BIG BOSS how Little Boss got stoned at lunch and dropped a tree on a building causing tens of thousands of dollars worth of damage. BIG BOSS is six feet tall standing up or laying down, with the disposition of a Grizzly Bear. His lunchtime activities included whiskey and cocaine and

a bad attitude, which I had no intention of experiencing due to someone else's screw-up. Discretion, that day, was the better part of valor.

I learned that if I showed up sober (mildly hung-over counted as sober) and clean shaven, the cantankerous bastard at the Day Labor office would send me to any of the available jobs that I wanted. I learned that I had a strong work ethic, and even though I made minimum wage, I always tried to give the company a good days work. Once the new company saw the caliber of my work, they would usually order more people, thinking that I or someone like me was what they would get. Then I would go home and read Dante, but I could never seem to find the correct circle.

If you wish to see the bottom side of the work force in America, and will work for spit, Day Labor is the way to go. Your paycheck might make you cry, but you will probably collect medical insurance for a busted gut from laughing at the antics of your co-workers. Bring you sense of humor.

David Thibeault, 50, lives in Haverhill, MA. David is majoring in computer science in NECC and took Basic Writing with Dr. Carol Barron, spring 2001.

Salsa Soul
by Hector Laracuente

It was a Friday night, and I was desperately waiting for this evening. One of the reasons was because I always have the weekends off from work, so it was my usual vacation. I had already received my check and had plans to go to a concert. My friends had invited me, and they had a ticket reserved for me. We went to see "Tito Rojas." He is a Spanish singer that has been an influence in my life through Salsa music. Salsa music has always been part of my life through my family and cultural background, since I was a little boy. Salsa is a rhythm made by a group of instruments. Some of the instruments are the trumpet, trombone, conga drums, percussion, and maracas. This brings the spirit of salsa, but, of course, without a vocalist, it is just a beat.

I remember when I was young, our family used to go to the beach every weekend. We would have a big cookout under the tropical sun and bring conga drums, trumpets, maracas, trombones and many more instruments. Every member of the family would have an assigned instrument; I would always choose the maracas because it was the easiest to play. I would concentrate on the rhythm of the other instruments, and copy the tempo and join in with the rest of the family. When all these instruments would combine while being played, they would create the rhythm of Salsa. This type of music helps me connect to my cultural background and history of the country. It also reminds me of the times when my mother used to take me by my hand and tell me, "Come on, let me teach you how to dance." I would start to watch her feet move and would practice with her. By the time I was six, I already knew how to dance and that is what kept me close to my roots. I also remembered the times where the whole neighborhood would be outside dancing all night, frying pigs on a stick with fire underneath, a tradition in my country.

I remember that night when I was in the concert. I was in a happy mood and full of energy ready to be released in the form of dance. Tito Rojas sang many cultural and romantic songs that night. One of the cultural songs was titled "The Island of

Enchantment." In the song, he sang about the island's beautiful tropical weather and its clear sandy beaches. He also described his experience while living his childhood in Puerto Rico. One of the lyrics stated, "We are like the Coqui. If we get taken away from our island, we won't survive." The Coqui is a little toad that lives in Puerto Rico. It is so adapted to its tropical habitat that if it leaves the island, it will perish. Most of the people in the crowd were from Puerto Rico and they were very understanding about his feelings towards the country. I noticed that they were Puerto Rican because throughout the song Rojas yelled, "Where are my people at?" That rallying cry gave me chills. Almost all the people in the concert were screaming their guts out to his scream.

Even though most Salsa music is for dancing and motivation, many Salsa songs seem to be based on the subject of love. Almost every artist writes songs about their love life. The rhythm is slower and mellow, creating a romantic dance. If you dance to love songs there are more emotions expressed while dancing. There is more contact between the couple, and the partners dance closer to each other.

I like Salsa music because it relaxes my soul. It creates an atmosphere of memories, dreams, fears, hope, etc. Salsa music will make you happy, and angry; it only matters how the person is feeling at the moment or what mood the song creates in the person while listening to the music. It has been in the Puerto Rican culture for many years since the beginning of the "Taino Indians." Before all the Spaniards took over the island, the music of Salsa continued to remain the rhythm of the island. Still today, it has been carried on from generation to generation in our Spanish societies. When I am not feeling emotional, I listen to Salsa to motivate my spirit. In addition, Salsa music is also used as a way to encourage, inspire and help me to believe in myself.

Hector Laracuente was a student in Joanna Fortna's class during the summer 2000 semester. He is an 18-year-old OR Technician and lives in Lawrence. Before taking Joanna's Basic Writing course, Hector already loved writing, but he feels more confident now that he has developed many skills through the help of the course. In between his job and his classes, Hector enjoys playing basketball and writing songs.

How Music Has an Influence on My Life
by Beverly White

Music to me is any type of sound. It takes a few sounds to make up rhythm and/or beat, and it takes even more noise to make a song. It takes just the right noises to make up good music. My favorite type of music is country. Billy Ray Cyrus is my absolute favorite singer. I feel that the blends of the country sounds are soothing and rhythmic. They just flow continuously to make the right blend of country music. I feel country music helps me to block out everything around me, and I am able to focus on what I want to focus on, like homework, doing things on the computer, or just resting.

When I was a very young child, all I would hear in my house for music would be country. I heard artists like Tammy Wynette, Jean Watson, Freddy Fender, and George Jones. I heard music like "Coal Miner's Daughter" by Loretta Lynn, "Farewell Party" by Jean Watson, "Rose Color Glasses" by John Conley, and "Crystal Chandelier" by Charlie Pride. My father did not like any other type of music; he felt that other types of music were a bad influence and that they should not be allowed in any home. He felt that country was the best and only type of music that should be listened to. Today he still feels the same way, except his feelings are stronger with the coming of rap, and present day rock and roll. I do not feel the same way, but country is mainly the only type of music I listen to. I don't feel that country should be the only music listened to, because it does not appeal to everyone like it does to me. I do feel that everyone should give all kinds of music a chance, especially country music. I find a way to involve country in my busy life schedule everyday just because it provides me with comfort.

Country music fits into my life style for many different reasons. When I was ten years old, my parents had brought me to my grandmother's sixty-fifth birthday party, and my gram's favorite song was "God Bless America," by Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty. I was really close to my grandmother, and she was my idol. I confided in her for everything, and she always gave the best advice. I remember her dancing the night of her birthday to "God bless America." She was wearing a beautiful lilac colored, knee-length dress with a big light pink and purple rose in the center. Her salt and pepper hair had just been permed, and as she danced, her curls bounced like a little kid playing with his ball. She was so happy that she was grinning from ear to ear. We lost her in 1985, and whenever I hear that song today, I cry and wish for her to be here today.

I really enjoy listening to country music in my spare time. Music is actually a good chunk of my life. I listen to music whenever I get the chance. I like to listen to music when I am driving in my van, usually on 99.5 FM, which is the country station. Also, when I am sitting at my computer, I listen to the songs that are on my Napster, like "I lost it" by Kenny Chesney and "Chain of Love" also by Kenny Chesney. While I am taking a walk, I listen to Shania Twain's "Honey I'm Home." When I am lying in bed, I listen to Donna Fargo's "Teddy Bear Song," and while I am doing my homework, I listen

to Lee Ann Womack's "Ashes by Now." It makes it easier for me to be able to concentrate on anything I am trying to do because the sounds of the music allow me to block out things around me so that I can concentrate. I believe it's because the rhythm and beat are so soothing and in most songs are calm. I use it for my concentration because at my house it is always noisy and hard to concentrate on anything. Listening to music allows me to block out the noise around me and to concentrate on my life.

I like country music, not only because I was brought up listening to it, but also because a lot of the songs either remind me of something or are about something that is happening or already happened in my life. There is a country song for everything. When I am down, I like to listen to "I Got It Honest," by Aaron Tippin, because of the fast beat and rhythm. The most intriguing lyrics are "Give em' all I got cause that's how it goes, and if you check out my paycheck there ain't that much on it, but every single penny I've paid. I got it honest." It signifies someone being happy that they are independent, and they are happy to be independent. Also, when I listen to it, it relaxes me and allows me to slow my life down. It is like a state of tranquility for me. I can sit down and listen to it for hours.

My favorite singer is Billy Ray Cyrus. He is a country singer. He has been my favorite singer ever since I heard and saw his first video, which was about eleven years ago. I have been to many of his concerts, and I had backstage passes to all of them. His music has just always been really good. He also has a lot of songs that relate to my life and he sings a lot of songs about America and freedom. I like songs like that because they bring back memories of my grandmother, to whom I was extremely close. I also think he is very good looking. He has dark brown wavy hair, brown eyes, a goat-tee, and muscular arms, with an Indian-style bracelet tattoo on his upper left arm. He is quite tall. He is now starring in his own show called "Doc." In the show, he sings many of his songs. The show is on every Sunday, and I make sure I am near a TV to be able to see it at 8 p.m. when it starts. I have all his CDs. I have multiple pictures of him, and I have clothes and many memoirs like that of him.

I will never forget the concert I went to in Maine. I got to hug him and have my husband take a picture of me hugging him. I was so happy, yet I had knots in my stomach. I asked him if I ever had to let go, and he said, "No. You can hold on as long as you want to, but I have to start my concert, and I don't think you would enjoy the stage very much." I laughed and squeezed him one more time before I let go. I got the pictures developed as soon as possible and had the one of him and me blown up to an 8 x 10 photo. The photo now hands over my dresser, and I see him every morning as I wake up and as I am doing my hair and make-up.

I believe country music has a positive influence on me. I say this because, like I said before, it provides a state of tranquility for me. It allows me to let all my stresses off of my back. It is how I concentrate on homework or anything else that is going on. It also is a way for me to let out my anger, hurt, happiness, and sadness. When I am upset, I listen to "God Bless America," and it allows me to be able to cry. When I cry, my sadness goes away. Crying is a way for me to let out all my troubles and get what is bothering me off of my mind. When I am mad, I listen to Billy Ray Cyrus' song "These Boots are Made for Walking." A line from what he sings is, "These boots are made for walking, and that's just what they'll do cause one of these days these boots are gonna

walk all over you." That song reminds me of someone like me getting his or her anger out. There is a song for anything.

I could not imagine my life without country music. I would always be in an upset or stressed mood without it. I would not have a way to concentrate or sit down and sort my life. I would not listen to music because any other type of music doesn't appeal to me the way country music does. I know that country is not everyone's style of music because I live with four daughters who are into the new music or the music of today. My husband likes country, but he is more into the music from the sixties. I feel that music is an important part of anyone's life. Also, I noticed that usually the type of music you are brought up listening to is usually your favorite type of music because the old style is the best style of country to me, and that is the country style I was brought up listening to. Also, my husband grew up listening to the music of the sixties, and, like I said, it is his favorite type of music. I suggest that you try country music first because you can easily learn to love it.

Beverly White, a 32-year-old homemaker, took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course in the spring 2001 semester. Beverly, who is married, lives in Haverhill and is aiming for a career in early childhood education. Before taking Joanna Fortna's class, Beverly never had an interest in writing, and now she has the faith in herself to create reasonably good writing.

An I Love You Date
by Sheila DeMatos

Is your marriage in a rut? Do you still see fireworks when he kisses you? Do you remember what it was like when you got all dressed up and went on a date? If the answers to these questions are no and you want to put the fire back into your marriage, read on.

The first thing you have to do is convince your husband that you both need a night out. If he argues with you, just bat your beautiful eyes at him and give him one of the most seductive smiles he has ever seen.

When he finally agrees with you, call his favorite restaurant and make a reservation for next Saturday night. Tell them that you want a table in an area that is out of the way and quiet.

After the reservations are made, call your hairdresser and make an appointment for next Saturday morning and tell her that you want the works (haircut and style, a manicure and a pedicure). Let her know that this is a very important date for you and that you want the best.

The next step is deciding what sexy outfit you're going to wear. If you don't have anything to wear, call a friend and tell her you have a special date Saturday night with your husband and you need to buy a sexy dress.

Now, you asked yourself what is he going to wear? You look into his closet and find a nice pair of pants and a shirt to match. After that, check to see if you can find his black dress shoes. If he's anything like my husband, you will find one shoe under the bed and the other one behind his desk.

When Saturday night comes and you are ready to leave, tell him you want to drive. If he argues with you, tell him that you're the only one who knows where you are going. He can't argue with that.

Once you get seated at the restaurant and the waiter comes over, tell him that you want to order appetizers and a couple of cokes. While you are waiting for your drinks and appetizers, start talking about all the fun you had while you were dating.

I remember my first date with my husband. Joe was so nervous that he made a reservation for one restaurant but took me to another. He told the hostess that he was sure he made a reservation for this restaurant and not another one. The hostess did not want to argue, so she found us an empty table. Over dinner, my husband confessed that he remembered that this was not the place he called. I didn't know whether to be embarrassed or just to laugh, but with the look on his face, I started laughing. I told him it would be our little secret, but later I shared this secret with my best friend, who got a laugh out of it.

When the waiter comes over for your order, ask your husband if you can order for him. Order his favorite meal. It will surprise him that you still remember. Continue

talking about the fun times you've had. Remind him about those hot summer night walks holding hands, giving each other little hugs and kisses, and talking about all your dreams.

When dinner is over, make sure that you pay the bill. If he argues with you about paying (he probably won't), tell him that you were the one to make this date and that you want to take care of everything.

On the way home, let him drive so that you can put on a romantic radio station. Put your head on his shoulder and whisper in his ear that there's more to come once you get home.

Once you get home, tell him to get ready for bed and that you will be right there. Go to the kitchen and find that bottle of wine that you put away for a special occasion. Get two glasses and go to your room, pour some wine into both glasses and hand him one. Tell him you want to make a toast, saying "May we always have time for an I love you date." As you are falling asleep, thank God for the husband you have and for the love he gives you.

Married with three children and a grandson, Sheila DeMatos manages to find enough time to go to school, write, read, and crochet. Before taking Mary O'Neil's fall 2000 Basic Writing course, Sheila didn't know how to write, but now with a lot of help from Mary, she loves it.

The Sky Is the Limit
by Massiel Munoz

There are many different kinds of adventures, but if you are really looking for an experience you'll never forget, then you have to go skydiving. I have only been skydiving once, but I'm looking forward to doing it again. Skydiving is a sport in which one or more people jump from an airplane and fall freely before opening a parachute. You get such a rush from falling from the sky. Your heart beats at 100mph. I know many people who said they were going to do it, but when it came time to jump out of the plane, they chickened out. If you want to go skydiving, here are some of the few things you need to do before you can experience this wonderful adventure.

In order to go skydiving, you have to find a jumping school that will make you feel comfortable. There are many schools in different locations. The one I went to was in New Jersey. It was a small private airport just for skydiving. If you want to find one near you and get more information, then call New England Adventure at 1-800-846-5867. Also, when you call up the school, ask if they are affiliated with USPA as a group member.

If you decide to go skydiving, here are a few things you need to know. Skydiving is not done all year round. You have to go between April and November because it is really hard to skydive in the winter. You have to be 18 or older to go skydiving. You need to show an ID, so take it with you. You can't be any more than 220lbs. The parachute can only take so much and if you pick the tandem jump, there will be two people putting a lot of weight on the parachute.

There are three types of jumps that you can make with two different prices are tandem jump ($125-$150), static jump ($125-$150) and the more advanced accelerated free fall jump ($250-$300). All you need to take is an ID and your guts. They will provide you with everything you need.

The next step is to pick one of the following jumps that you want to do. If you don't want to jump by yourself then the tandem jump is for you. This jump allows you to take a ride with an experienced jumper. It requires only 15 to 45 minutes of ground preparation. They will explain how the parachute will open and who will open it. They will also tell you what to expect when free falling. Then you will share a single oversized harness attached to the front of the master diver's harness. The two of you will free fall together for about 30 seconds at an altitude of 3,000 feet, and then the parachute will open. You will land together under a single huge parachute.

However, the static line requires 4-5 hours of ground training. It requires more training because you will free fall by yourself. You will have a static line attached to the plane, but you need to know what to do if they can't open the parachute from the plane. You will be taken to an altitude of about 3,000 to 4,000 feet for the jump. As you fall

away from the plane, the static line attached to the plane opens the main parachute. You will experience two or three seconds of free fall before the parachute opens.

On the other hand, accelerated free fall (AFF) is totally different from tandem jump and static line. The AFF program will give you a true taste of modern sport. The ground training for AFF requires 5 to 6 hours. It requires many more hours because you will open your own parachute. It is a bit more intense than static jump because you will be allowed to free fall for about 50 seconds on your first jump. You will exit the plane at 10,000 + feet with two AFF jump masters who will grip you until you open the main parachute. They will be falling next to you.

As a result of the free fall, you will reach a speed of 100 to110mph with the tandem and accelerated free fall methods. As for the static line methods, your parachute opens up immediately, but you will not experience the high speed of free falling. People are always asking, "Is this risky?" Compared to what? The reality is that not everything is risk free. Risk is a part of life. It can be managed but rarely eliminated. For example, automobiles have 22,359 annual fatalities in the United States, but people still get on the roads every day. In skydiving there are only 32 annual fatalities in the United States.

Furthermore, choosing a jumping school with several years of experience and good safety records will reduce the risk. In addition to following safety instructions, using safety equipment such as helmets will also reduce the risk. Also, if the main parachute doesn't open, you do have an emergency parachute. The most important thing is not to panic; it will only make the situation worse.

If you panic when you are already up in the plane, there is no problem. Just remember you are paying for this. You will ride down on the plane with the pilot, but you'll only get back half of your money if you don't want to postpone. You can reschedule for another time and have a credit with them. The only bad part of rescheduling is that you have to take the class over again. Personally, if I couldn't make the jump, I would reschedule.

Skydiving is not for everybody, but if you are looking for something crazy to do, this is the sport for you. You need to have courage and guts to go skydiving. Don't do it just to impress your friends. Skydiving is safe if you take the instruction seriou[illegible] if you jump because you want to jump. So go ahead and try it; you will not regret ...

Massiel Munoz is a 20-year-old General Studies major at NECC, and she is aiming to become a radiology technician. While she is not studying or writing papers, Massiel enjoys dancing and reading books. Before taking Mary O'Neil's fall 2000 Basic Writing course, Massiel hated writing, but now she actually likes it.

Some Easy Steps to Learn English
by Juan Saldarriaga

As an immigrant, I know how difficult it is to live in a country without speaking, understanding, and writing its language. Many opportunities in my life come to me because I speak more than one language: English and Spanish. English is known as the universal language, so being able to speak English makes me think that I won't have many communication problems wherever I go around the world. If you follow a simple process, you will be able to improve your English.

First thing everybody should do in order to improve his or her English is look for school where he or she can go and take English classes to practice the language. Here, in Lawrence, there are some good school programs where you can go. One is the Adult Learning Center and another is located at the Saint Mary School. The staff will make you take a writing exam and depending on the results, they will tell you at what level you should start. Going to school, you will learn a lot and you will improve your English grammar and vocabulary.

The second step I recommend is to start listening to English radio stations and watch English speaking TV shows and movies. This will help you to develop your auditory sense for better listening and understanding of English. Some good TV programs that are very good to start are those that have been made for children because they have a very easy way to show you basic English. Another good program to watch is the news. Right now, there is a very good feature on TV that combines listening and reading and could help with your writing too. It is called closed caption for the hearing impaired. This system can help you a lot because while you are listening and watching TV, you can read simultaneously what the people are saying. Doing this, you will be able to start to understand anyone who talks to you in English. Once you start to understand what others are saying to you, you won't make as many mistakes and the world will start changing for you. Understanding by listening may take some time, but later you will have more confidence in yourself.

The third step is to read English. Reading English will help you a lot in order to improve another important communication skill, writing. Reading newspapers, books, magazines, and any other kind of literature will help you to develop a better vocabulary. You can learn many other different ways to say something using the correct words. For me, newspapers are very helpful because in them you can find many different topics that you can enjoy reading, while at the same time you are learning.

Once you understand a little more English, you will feel more confident to start writing English well. After first listening and reading in English, if you go to school, you will practice a lot of writing in journals and different kinds of essays. I would say that writing is the next step to understand English. You will write about some specific topics that your teacher will correct with you to let you know what you need to do better, and

she will recommend what to do next. I think the best way to write in English is to write about real things that happened to you because that will be easier than to invent other stories.

Next, in the process of learning English, don't be afraid to practice it. Talking with others will help you to improve your speaking skills. Often many people will help you when you have to say something that is a little difficult for you to pronounce. Most people understand how difficult it is to speak a new language because it is not as easy as it seems. It took me about one year before I started to understand enough English to keep a conversation with someone else. Be patient and your English will come out better day after day.

Finally, the main thing to learn a new language is to be willing to learn it. Many people used to say things like, "I'm not good at learning languages." I think that is not true. We have the ability to learn more than we realize; but when we think in a negative way, we don't go forward. To reach our goals, we have to take advantage of the opportunities that life gives us all the time.

Juan C. Saldarriaga, 32, lives in Lawrence with his family. He is a quality control analyst at BBC Microbiology in Worcester, and he is aiming for a career in microbiology. Before taking Clare Thompson's fall 2000 course, Juan was afraid to write in English because it is not his native language, but now he feels much better. He says, "My writing is stronger now. I'm more organized when I have to write an essay."

Living off the System
by Evelyn Bezares

It makes me angry that there are so many people on welfare. Every time I go to the supermarket (especially on the first of the month) I know the lines are going to be ridiculous because people just received their welfare checks. It disgusts me that there are so many young people on the system. They all look young and healthy, able to work a 40-hour a week job. Instead, they have about three or four children with them. I do not mind that they have so many children, but they need to work.

While they are living off the taxpayer's money they should return the favor by at least trying to get off the system. The majority of them also have the nerve to be wearing a whole bunch of jewelry and swiping their EBT card without any shame. The EBT card is the card that welfare gives their recipients to use. It looks like an identification card that also serves as a bankcard.

The government should be able to find these recipients jobs at local stores. They could also probably work at a fast food place like McDonalds or Burger King. One time when I went into McDonalds to purchase some food, I saw a girl that had to be at least seven months pregnant working as a cashier. I thought to myself, "God bless that girl." It takes a lot of strength to be standing all day in a smelly place like that, especially being pregnant.

I have a friend who has been on welfare for about three years. She has three children living with her and her spouse. When she first went on the system, she only had one child. Welfare was paying for her rent and utilities. She also received about $150 bi-weekly in food stamps. When she gave birth to her second child, welfare increased her food stamps. When she gave birth to her third child she was making close to $400 a month in food stamps. It seemed the more children she had the more money she received.

I asked her how she got past the system without making the father of her children pay child support. She simply said she told welfare that she did not know who the father was. I was furious to find out how she got away with it. I even felt like calling up as an anonymous person and telling welfare that there is someone committing fraud on the system, but I did not. Welfare also needs to do random checkups at the apartments of these people.

The government should not give welfare to teenage girls if they claim that they are on their third child. Also, that they still do not know whom the father of the third one is either. Half of these teenage girls on welfare do not even have a GED, high school diploma, or a college degree for that matter. Welfare should enforce everyone that is young with many children to go back and finish school or go to work.

There are elderly people who are on the system also, but they definitely need it. Welfare also provides MassHealth that is a medical prescription card. This is for people

that do not have the money for drug prescriptions and check-ups. Medications are very expensive and if you are elderly with no one to help you, welfare should. I have yet to see an elderly person swiping an EBT card. When I went to the pharmacy to pick up one of my prescriptions, there was an elderly person picking up her medication and putting it on her tab. I feel sympathy for them whenever I see that. Welfare should not deny the elderly help financially or medically. Let's face it, we don't even know when we get older if we are going to have a social security check.

I would rather my tax dollars be spent on Medicare and food stamps for the elderly and some of the young people, instead of everyone that applies for welfare getting it. I feel the majority of the teenage girls abuse the system. We as taxpayers should get together and start a petition, which would indicate exactly how the government is letting many things go unnoticed. Hopefully then welfare will choose their participants more wisely.

Evelyn Bezares found writing tiresome before taking Margaret Bergeron's fall 2000 Basic Writing course. Evelyn works as an accounts payable clerk and enjoys spending her free time with her four-year-old son.

Insurance, Help or To Hurt?
by Gregory Corthell

Auto insurance prices are too high, especially for teens just getting their licenses. It disgusts me that we have to pay high prices when we first get our licenses. Yes, I can understand that we are just learning how to drive, but we should at least have a chance to prove ourselves.

Adults today disagree with what I might be saying because they think that we don't have enough experience to drive. Not every teenager gets speeding tickets or gets in car accidents. Yes, there are a lot of bad adult and teenage drivers out there, but just because we have never driven before does not mean that we are bad drivers. I don't like it.

I will use myself as an example. Two years ago, I bought a car when I first got my license. It was a 1982 Cutlass Supreme. I paid $800 for it. My car insurance under my parent's name was $1,400 a year. That was with basic insurance. My insurance was more than I paid for my car. Today I have a newer car, which is a 1995 Mercury Mystique. I needed to take a loan out for this car. Now I have to have full coverage on my car. The price of the insurance came out to be about $2,000 a year in my parent's name with a perfect record and with three years driving experience. If it was in my name with nothing changed, it would be about $2,300. That is insane! How are teenagers that make about $6 an hour and go to school full-time able to afford this?

Adults say that there are too many older junky cars out on the road. Do you think that insurance prices might be the reason why teenagers are driving old cars? I do! Adults today expect us to do a lot of things, like go to school and hold a job, but look at what we have working against us to achieve things. It can be hard. I am lucky I have a good job that pays well so I can afford these outrageous prices.

In my opinion, I think that insurance prices should be lowered so teens can afford safer cars and start off in good standing. This would make it so we do not have to work all the time and the paycheck that we get does not all have to go towards insurance. It could go to better things like college, going out with friends to the movies, and making repairs on your car. I do think you should punish them with higher prices if they do get into an accident or get a speeding ticket. Give us a chance!

Insurance companies also hit adults with higher prices for claiming teens on their insurance when they first get their licenses. What else can they get you for? In most states, it is mandatory for you to have insurance on your car to even drive it. They have you no matter what. As the teen is going on the parent's insurance plan the nice step rating that has been there before your child has gone on the insurance goes down, and the price of insurance goes up. I think they are punishing parents for giving them business. That is why teenagers are forced to get their own insurance under their own names.

In closing, insurance laws should give teenagers a chance. Once you screw up and get in an accident or a speeding ticket you should be penalized. That should affect you depending on the circumstances. I think everyone would benefit from the prices being lowered.

Gregory Corthell is more confident in his writing after taking Carol Barron's Basic Writing course, fall 2000. A business major at NECC, Gregory enjoys baseball and music.

Older People in the United States
by Altagracia Frias

Elderly in the United States are not treated as well as they deserve. I see that people do not spend time with the elderly; people prefer to bring them to nursing homes and forget about them. I think that it is not fair to care for them like that after they took care of their children. The elderly need love, care, and attention to their necessities.

In the United States elderly are not treated as well as they need to be treated. Once people get older and they are not able to work or take care of themselves, their relatives take them to a nursing home. Excuses are made because people have too much work and do not have any time for them.

Nursing homes sometimes do not take good care of our elderly; they just give them minimal attention. For instance, I have a friend named Katy, who lives in a nursing home. Every time I go there I see how older people are left by themselves without any attention. I try to make her feel good, let her know that she is important to me and that I care about her. I usually bring books that I read to her because she enjoys my reading a lot, especially story books which are her favorites. I see many faces full of sadness, asking for some love and care from us.

From my own experience, I have seen elderly people not treated very well. Here is an example of an old lady who lives across the street from my house. She has her own apartment, but doesn't want to live by herself, so she asked one of her granddaughters to live with her. I see how her granddaughter swears at her and tells her she is boring because she doesn't allow her to put the radio loud or have parties at home. The grandmother permits this because she doesn't want to be alone or live in a nursing home. She has many other daughters and grandchildren, but no one wants to live with her.

I see a big difference in the way elderly are treated in the United States than the way they are treated in my country, The Dominican Republic. Elderly in my country stay home with their son/daughter and grandchildren. They live together in the same house and take care of each other. While mom and dad go to work, the grandma takes care of the children. I think elderly feel happy living with their relatives and being useful.

The elderly in my country mostly love to live in farmhouses where they can plant trees and take care of animals. I used to live with my grandma in my country and we lived in her farmhouse together where she had hundreds of animals and there were many things to do. In my opinion, the elderly feel better if they do any kind of work, such as planting trees, taking care of animals or watching our children. Personally, I think that in most cases it works because every person in this world wants to do something in order to feel useful.

The way that the elderly are treated in my country is a good way. I think the elderly should stay home with their family and not live in a nursing home, as most elderly

Americans do. I know that the elderly should be treated with respect and as if they were *our* parents. This is the way that my parents show my sister and me, and I still think it's the best way.

If we stop one minute to think how our grandparents used to treat us and how much love they gave us I'm sure that many of us would change the way we treat and think about older people. We must change our minds about how society treats the elderly so that they are treated with respect, love, and care. I believe that the elderly must be treated well and hope that society will be more compassionate to the elderly.

Before taking Basic Writing with Joanna Fortna in the spring of 2001, Altagracia Frias felt weak about her writing. She believes taking the course has improved her writing. Altagracia is a business major at NECC.